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ABSTRACT

One of a series concerning state policies and practices in child care and early education, this report profiles state-driven comprehensive early childhood initiatives designed to create state and local partnerships that share power and responsibility while promoting local decision-making autonomy in spending resources to improve services for children and families with the end result of improving school readiness. The focus of the report is on the experiences of nine states with comprehensive initiatives involving children up to age five and their families and that have some funding for implementation. The states are: California, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Chapter 1 provides an overview of each initiative. Chapter 2 details potential benefits and hazards of the initiatives. Chapter 3 presents a blueprint for state-driven local initiatives, while chapters 4 through 10 detail the components common to effective planning initiatives: (1) creating a strong state governance; (2) establishing clear guidelines for local councils; (3) building broad constituencies across sectors; (4) investing adequate resources and developing flexible spending policies; (5) identifying and supporting local capacity; (6) linking planning to accountability; and (7) understanding the uses and limits of evaluation. Chapter 11 concludes that in order to succeed, comprehensive early childhood initiatives must be built on a stable foundation secured with new state funding, a clear vision and strong leadership, and reasonable expectations. The report's four appendices include descriptions of allowable uses of state initiative funds and provide resource and contact information. (Contains 26 endnotes and a list of related publications.) (KB)

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State-Driven Community Early Childhood Initiatives

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CDF provides a strong, effective voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, into trouble, drop out of school, or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations. We have never taken government funds.

BRINGING IT TOGETHER:

State-Driven Community Early Childhood Initiatives

Laurie Miller • Atelia Melaville • Helen Blank

CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND
2002

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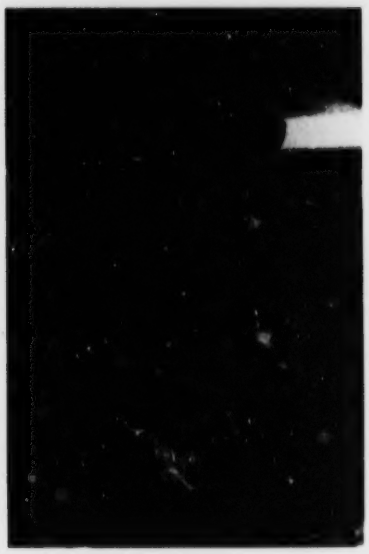


Introduction

Public and private organizations devoted to early childhood and education are found in every community. Many of these organizations have access to federal, state, and local funds, yet the amounts available from all of these sources are not nearly enough to reach every child or to build a truly comprehensive system.

Community agencies compete for what is available, to do what is possible. And there is much that is being done well. But children and families might do even better if community partners had the resources to plan together how to make a real and sustained difference in the lives of their children and families; to find out what young people really need to succeed in school and beyond; and how partners might help each other do a better job. Every day, child care and Head Start providers, health center nurses, kindergarten teachers, city council and county commission members, grandparents, neighbors, parents, and young children pay the price for the lack of community agreement. They are frustrated by gaps in access to affordable, high quality services for young children and families and their communities' lack of resources to fill these gaps. Those who are closest to the problems and who care the most often have limited decision-making power as well as inadequate resources to do their job.

This report is about state-driven comprehensive early childhood initiatives—one approach designed to make it easier for communities, with guidance and support from state government, to pull together on behalf of young children. These initiatives are designed to create state and local partnerships that share power and responsibility and promote local autonomy to

With sufficient resources, a clear vision, collaborative leadership, and reasonable expectations, state-driven community planning initiatives are a strategy that can make a difference for children and families.

make decisions about how best to spend resources to improve services for children and families. The intended result: to measurably increase school readiness among young children. This kind of state and local partnership is only one of many strategies needed to build a system of accessible, affordable, and high quality child care and early childhood supports. With sufficient resources, a clear vision, collaborative leadership, and reasonable expectations, it is a strategy that can make a difference.

America's economic future depends on ensuring that all children have a solid foundation that allows them to enter school healthy and well, and with the early learning skills necessary to become strong readers and good students. Our economy also depends on the availability of stable, affordable child care options so that parents can work. In order to meet both of these goals, families must have access to a range of early childhood opportunities that address their children's education, health, mental health, and nutritional needs as well as strengthen parents' ability to support their children.

The building blocks that communities currently have to develop this network of supports for children and their families include the following:

- Family leave
- The Child Care and Development Block Grant
- Head Start
- Early Head Start
- State prekindergarten initiatives
- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- Even Start
- Early intervention programs for children with disabilities and other special needs
- The Child and Adult Care Food Program
- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Family support and home visiting programs
- Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

Each of these building blocks offers help to children and families. However, none of them alone responds to the totality of children and families' needs nor is the combined funding adequate to reach all the children and families who could benefit. Each component could be strengthened and expanded. State-driven community early childhood initiatives can help to do this in several ways. They offer a forum for community leaders to weave together these varied

components at the local level. They also serve as a vehicle for directing new resources to expand and improve each of the elements so that they can individually and collectively better meet the needs of children and families.

Bringing It Together: State-Driven Community Early Childhood Initiatives is based on the experiences of nine states in which comprehensive community early childhood initiatives are already underway. We limited our selection to initiatives that focus on children up to age five and their families and that have some funding for implementation. The states with early childhood initiatives that are profiled include: California, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Although aimed primarily at children age 2.9 years to the age of kindergarten entry, Massachusetts' Community Partnerships for Children is included because it affects programs serving children from infancy. Alabama's recently created Kidstuff, introduced by Governor Don Siegelman in Spring 2001, is not included. This very new statewide early child care and education initiative based on North Carolina's Smart Start does not yet have funding for implementation. Texas, which gives flexibility to local workforce boards to plan for child care, is not included either, because it is not as comprehensive in scope. The report also does not discuss the federal government's new limited effort to support community initiatives through the Early Learning Opportunities Act.

The purpose of this report is to provide a look at an intriguing and important strategy at the state level and to share the experiences of states that are using this approach. Rather than to evaluate individual state efforts based on those experiences, this report outlines what states and communities can do to successfully implement community-based early childhood initiatives.

The state initiatives differ widely. They vary in the size and source of their financial commitment, the number of communities involved, their governance structures, their goals, and their stage of development. Most are still in the early stages of implementation. A few, like North Carolina and Massachusetts, have been in operation for several years. Because they have had more time than other states to mature and fine-tune their efforts, many of the lessons reported here are based on their experiences. Each initiative also reflects its own state's political, economic, and social circumstances, as well as its early childhood needs and resources. These variations—and opportunities for innovation—are mirrored at the local level. Overviews of each initiative are contained in this chapter. Examples drawn from state and local experience illustrate key points throughout the text.

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) has worked closely with child advocates in all nine states. To learn more about the potential benefits—and hazards—of initiatives in these states, we convened conversations among key players, conducted telephone interviews, and reviewed background materials. We also tracked state legislation, expansions and revisions to state policies and local strategies, and changes in funding through the state's 2001 fiscal year. While each state must craft its own specific policies, the experience of these trail-blazing states provides a useful blueprint for others to follow.

The report first discusses potential benefits and hazards of state and local partnerships to improve education and supports for young children and their families and then presents a blueprint for state-driven local initiatives. This blueprint also offers guidance to states and communities based on the experience of the nine states. This guide advises those planning and administering state-driven comprehensive early childhood initiatives to take these important steps:

- Create strong state governance
- Establish clear guidelines for local councils
- Build broad constituencies across sectors
- Invest adequate resources and develop flexible spending policies
- Identify and support local capacity
- Link planning to accountability
- Understand the uses and limits of evaluation.

The report discusses each recommendation in depth and provides illustrations from a variety of both state and local perspectives. Three themes echo throughout: the importance of new funding, a clear vision and strong leadership, and reasonable expectations. Since the presence or absence of these elements affect every phase of an initiative's design and implementation, they constitute the foundation on which successful efforts are built.

California

Name. Proposition 10 California Children and Families Initiative

Start Date. A state ballot initiative was passed in November 1998.

Funding and Source. $650 million was raised in state fiscal year 2001 from a statewide 50-cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes and tobacco.

Use of Funds. County commissions may use Proposition 10 funds to provide early care and education, child health services, and parenting education and support.

Population Served. Children prenatal to five years and their families.

Composition of State Board and Role. An independent seven-member board, the California Children and Families Commission (CCFC), is appointed by the governor, the Senate Rules Committee, and the speaker of the House. The commission includes representatives from education, health, and public health. It provides oversight and technical assistance to local commissions, develops guidelines, funds research and evaluation of local commission activities, and conducts a media campaign on the importance of children's first five years. The CCFC has also committed $200 million over several years for a statewide school readiness initiative that targets neighborhoods with schools most needing improvement as measured by the Academic Performance Index. The CCFC will partner with the Office of the Secretary for Education and other state agencies on this effort. They will provide incentive grants to be matched by county commission and other local resources to develop local school readiness centers and programs that demonstrate a coordinated research-based approach to early care and education.

Composition of Local Board and Role. Counties must establish new local commissions consisting of five to nine members. The commissions must include one member of the county board of supervisors, the county health officer, and one member responsible for the management of county children's services, public health services, behavioral health services, social services, or tobacco and other substance abuse prevention and treatment services. Two to six other members from the community sit on the commissions as well, and must be chosen from the following categories: recipients of services provided by the county plan, early childhood educators, representatives of a local child care resource and referral agency or child care coordinating group, prevention or early intervention programs for families at risk, local school districts, or local medical, pediatric, or obstetrical associations and societies. The county commissions develop and implement plans for the use of Proposition 10 funds in their communities. They must target funding to activities that promote improved early childhood development, health care, child care, and family functioning.

Localities Covered. All 58 counties participate.

Achievements. County commissions have increased child care provider wages, offered providers financial assistance for education and training, provided grants for new equipment for child care programs, funded home visits for parents of newborns and other young children, linked health and child care services, provided direct family support and parent education, and improved early care and education programs through quality enhancement grants.

Colorado

Name. Consolidated Child Care Pilots

Start Date. The Colorado General Assembly established the Consolidated Child Care Pilots during the 1997 legislative session.

Funding and Source. The pilots consolidate state prekindergarten funds with Head Start, Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant dollars to support early care and education, health and mental health, and parenting services. In addition, the state makes small grants available to the pilots on a competitive basis, using state budget surplus funds from a variety of sources. In spring 2001, the Assembly earmarked $1.5 million of CCDBG funds specifically for the Consolidated Child Care Pilots.

Use of Funds. Local councils must create a seamless early care and education system, improve child care quality, and provide child care services that respond to the needs of working parents.

Population Served. Children birth to five years and their families.

Composition of State Board and Role. The initiative is coordinated at the state level by the Colorado Department of Human Services in conjunction with the Colorado Department of Education. These agencies are responsible for managing the initiative and providing funding to the pilots. A state technical assistance team, comprised of staff from the departments of Human Services and Education, the statewide Child Care Resource and Referral Office, and the Center for Human Investment Policy at the University of Colorado at Denver, provides individualized support to pilot communities.

Composition of Local Board and Role. New local councils must be established by each pilot community. The councils must have a minimum of six members and include representatives from the county Board of Commissioners, local school district boards, and the county Department of Social Services as well as the local Head Start grantee, a licensed for-profit child care provider, and a licensed nonprofit child care provider. Local councils are required to ensure collaboration among agencies in the delivery of early childhood services. They may request waivers of state requirements in order to maximize their existing resources, including their child care and prekindergarten funding streams, and consolidate state, local, and federal dollars.

Localities Covered. There are 18 Consolidated Child Care Pilots, covering approximately one-third of Colorado's 63 counties.

Achievements. The Consolidated Child Care Pilots have focused on child care quality improvements and increasing the types of care most needed in their communities. They have improved provider reimbursement rates and raised the income eligibility cutoff for families to qualify for child care assistance. They have also expanded the availability of infant and toddler care, prekindergarten for three-year-olds, licensed providers who are willing to serve children receiving subsidies, and full-day, full-year child care. Pilots have linked child care with health, mental health, and family support programs and improved collaboration and communication among child care, Head Start, and prekindergarten agencies and programs as well.

Florida

Name. Florida Partnership for School Readiness

Start Date. The Florida legislature established the initiative in 1999.

Funding and Source. The legislation gave authority over federal CCDBG subsidy and quality dollars, state prekindergarten, migrant prekindergarten, Title I, and teen parent programs to the state partnership. Prior to 1999, child care and early education programs were administered by two state agencies and their local entities. The state's prekindergarten system and its early intervention services were housed within the Department of Education. Sixty-seven local school districts administered these programs, with a total budget of approximately $100 million. Child care programs were administered by the Division of Child Care Services within the state's Department of Children and Families. Child care subsidy funds flowed through 25 local child care coordinating agencies, many of which served multiple counties. Child care quality dollars were administered by child care resource and referral agencies at the local level. The budget for child care was approximately $500 million. In state fiscal year 2001, Florida increased state funding for child care by $71 million. Local partnerships with approved plans could use 5 percent of their allocation for local quality initiatives. Local partnerships that submitted applications for funding prior to January 1, 2000 or March 1, 2000 received planning grants of $50,000 or $25,000 respectively. Funding is expected to decrease in state fiscal year 2002.

Use of Funds. Local partnerships are charged to coordinate early childhood programs to make them more effective. They must use their county's allocation for child care subsidies, quality enhancement, prekindergarten, and some family support programs to fund activities that prepare preschool children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and expand access to community services. Local partnerships are required to implement a sliding fee scale for child care and prekindergarten.

Population Served. Children birth to five years and their families.

Composition of State Board and Role. The initiative is led by a state partnership board composed of the lieutenant governor, the commissioner of Education, the secretary of the Department of Children and Families, the secretary of Health, the chair of the Child Care Executive Partnership Board, the chair of the Workforce Development Board of Directors, and ten members appointed by the governor (including civic, community, and business leaders). The board is responsible for allocating funds to local partnerships in each of Florida's counties, developing guidelines, and reviewing and approving local plans and activities. It is also involved in developing a system for measuring school readiness and possibly standards for the prekindergarten program. Authority over the Partnership for School Readiness was transferred in May 2001 from the state Office of School Readiness, located in the governor's office, to the Agency for Workforce Innovation, which is responsible for workforce training and welfare-to-work efforts.

Composition of Local Board and Role. Counties must form new partnership boards that consist of at least 18, but no more than 25, members. The partnerships must include the Department of Children and Family Services district administrator, a district superintendent of schools, a regional Workforce Development Board chair or director, a county Health Department director or designee, a Children's Services Council or Juvenile Welfare Board chair or executive director, a child care licensing

Florida (continued)

agency head, one member appointed by the Department of Children and Family Services district administrator, one member appointed by a school board, and a representative from a central child care agency. The partnerships plan and implement child care services and encourage coordination and collaboration with prekindergarten, Head Start, Even Start, First Start, and other programs. They are also responsible for improving families' access to programs by creating a simplified point of entry, which allows parents to apply for child care subsidies and other early childhood services through a centralized system with satellite facilities in locations convenient for families with children, such as supermarkets or libraries. In addition, local partnership plans are required to include choices for parents, a single sliding fee scale for all programs funded under the partnership, and performance standards. The plans must demonstrate an effort to provide full-day, full-year care as well. Local partnerships now can decide whether to continue supporting prekindergarten and whether to continue child care tiered reimbursement programs. These had been offered statewide until May 2001, when the legislature repealed the state prekindergarten program and a number of other statutes that support children and families, including a provision in the Gold Seal system that established a three-tier quality rating system for subsidized child care providers.

Localities Covered. Fifty-seven local partnerships cover all of Florida's counties.

Achievements. Many partnerships have created a single point of entry for services and a unified waiting list for child care, prekindergarten, Head Start, and other programs. A few county partnerships have been able to leverage contributions from community foundations to support their activities.

Iowa

Name. Community Empowerment Areas Initiative

Start Date. Iowa's legislature enacted the initiative in 1998.

Funding and Source. The initiative is supported by two sources: School Ready grants from state general revenue and Early Childhood funds, which are federal TANF dollars transferred to the CCDBG. In state fiscal year 2001, $10.2 million in School Ready funds and $3.8 million in Early Childhood funds were awarded. Total funding is expected to increase to $15.6 million in state School Ready funds and $6.2 million in federal Early Childhood (TANF) funds in state fiscal year 2002.

Use of Funds. School Ready funds support comprehensive school readiness plans for children birth to five and their parents, which can include prekindergarten, parent support and education activities such as home visitation, child development services, child care, and health and safety services. Early Childhood funds are targeted toward increasing child care capacity to support parents' ability to obtain or retain employment. They can also be used to develop capacity for child care such as odd-hour and after-school care, recruit and train providers, assist providers in meeting licensing, registration, or accreditation standards, enhance linkages with Early Head Start, Head Start, and other child development programs, and pay for minor remodeling to meet health and safety standards.

Population Served. Children birth to five years and their families.

Composition of State Board and Role. A 22-member state Empowerment Board includes 12 citizens appointed by the governor, three state senators, three state representatives, and the directors of the state departments of Education, Human Services, Human Rights, and Public Health. The state board approves local requests for funding, develops statewide goals for children and families, and identifies core indicators of performance to assess the effectiveness of the local councils. The board also establishes guidelines and provides technical assistance through state agencies to local councils. It is responsible for handling local requests for waivers of state and federal rules, developing recommendations regarding amendments of state laws, seeking federal waivers, redirecting existing public and private funding, and reducing redundancy and overlap in the work of existing boards, commissions, and committees at the state and local levels as well.

Composition of Local Board and Role. To receive their Community Empowerment allocations, communities must constitute new local councils with broad-based membership from citizens, elected officials, representatives from local human services, health, and education departments, and religious and business communities. At least one recipient of public services must sit on the council. A majority must be citizens or elected officials. The council leads the community assessment process and develops a collaborative plan for young children and their families. Councils must identify desired outcomes for children and families as well.

Localities Covered. All of Iowa's 99 counties participate.

Achievements. Local councils have increased the number of providers that offer odd-hour care. They have also recruited and trained child care providers, assisted providers in meeting accreditation standards, enhanced linkages among Early Head Start, Head Start, health programs, and child care, and provided parent support and education through home visiting programs such as Parents as Teachers (PAT).

Kansas

Name. Smart Start Kansas

Start Date. The initiative began implementation in 2001.

Funding and Source. In state fiscal year 2001, Smart Start Kansas is authorized to distribute $2.75 million of tobacco settlement funds to community partnerships. The legislature has allocated $3 million for the effort for state fiscal year 2002. Local councils are required to provide a 20 percent match (10 percent cash and 10 percent in-kind).

Use of Funds. Funds can support programs and services that improve access to high quality and affordable child care, health care, and other family services.

Population Served. Children birth to five years and their families.

Composition of State Board and Role. The Kansas Children's Cabinet was established by the legislature. The cabinet consists of nine voting members and six non-voting members who are appointed by the governor and the ranking members in the legislature. Voting members include several citizens, the Kansas insurance commissioner, a county district judge, the state attorney general, a state senator, and a state representative. Non-voting members include a State Supreme Court justice, the secretaries of the state departments of Education, Social and Rehabilitation Services, and Health and Environment, as well as a university professor and a representative from the state Juvenile Justice Authority. The board responsibilities include assisting the governor in developing and implementing a coordinated, comprehensive service delivery system for children and families, identifying barriers to and gaps in services due to strict definition of boundaries between departments and agencies, facilitating interagency cooperation and the coordination of funds and activities across departmental borders, and facilitating and coordinating joint planning and service delivery between the public and private sectors. The cabinet also allocates funds for Kansas Smart Start to communities through a competitive grant process.

Composition of Local Board and Role. Local Smart Start Kansas partnerships are newly created boards that are designed to take advantage of existing community collaborative efforts. The local partnerships must include representation from at least 12 of the following 17 categories: mental health centers, private child care providers, cooperative extension services, Head Start, social and rehabilitation services, schools, health departments, the religious community, businesses, family representatives, community colleges or universities, libraries, government agencies, child care resource and referral agencies, interagency coordinating councils, and other nonprofit organizations and foundations. Pilot partnerships are involved in activities such as improving the quality of child care and early education, ensuring that child care and early education are available to every child who needs and wants them by addressing the supply and types of child care in a community, funding transportation initiatives to get children to child care, and assisting parents with child care costs to make child care and early childhood education affordable to all families. The communities can also use Smart Start Kansas funds to deliver comprehensive health care and education to young children.

Localities Covered. There are seven pilot Smart Start Kansas communities.

Achievements. In 2001, the seven pilot communities established their partnerships, identified lead fiscal agents, conducted community assessments, and produced plans

Kansas (continued)

that were endorsed by the members of the community partnerships. The partnerships are using the funds to improve the quality of child care and education, increase the supply of child care and early education, provide child care subsidies, improve the delivery of health care by integrating health services for young children into community services including child care programs, and support child care resource and referral, parent education, and family literacy programs.

Kentucky

Name. KIDS NOW

Start Date. State legislation was passed in 1999.

Funding and Source. In July 2001, $1.6 million of tobacco settlement funds were made available for the initiative over a period of two years.

Use of Funds. Local councils may use these funds as seed money to improve community early childhood services by encouraging collaboration and supporting planning and implementation of comprehensive services, including child care, health, and family support programs. Funds may not be used to operate programs.

Population Served. Children prenatal to five years and their families.

Composition of State Board and Role. The Early Childhood Development Authority spearheads the KIDS NOW initiative. The authority, which is attached to the governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, consists of 17 members. These include the executive director of the Office of Early Childhood Development, the secretary of the Education, Arts and Humanities Cabinet, the secretary of the Cabinet for Health Services, the secretary of the Cabinet for Children and Families, representatives appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives and the president of the Senate, 10 private sector and citizen members appointed by the governor, and an early childhood advocate. The authority must develop biannual state plans that identify state funding priorities, approve local plans, disburse funds to communities, and raise public awareness about the importance of the early childhood years.

Composition of Local Board and Role. Communities must form early childhood councils that are required to collaborate with existing agencies and interagency task forces. Membership of the community early childhood councils must include no fewer than seven and no more than 27 local representatives from the following categories: early childhood advocates, the local school district, Head Start or Early Head Start, child care, child care resource and referral agencies or child care subsidy agents, child care consumers or parents, foster care parents, adoptive parents, health care professionals, county cooperative extension services, public health organizations, universities, colleges or technical schools, early intervention, family literacy, home visitation, community action agencies, regional training centers, public libraries, local government, agencies that provide services to children with disabilities, and the business and religious communities. The councils must develop and implement strategies to enhance quality, and report on progress quarterly. Community early childhood councils may also make recommendations on the Early Childhood Development Authority's biannual state plan.

Localities Covered. All 120 counties were eligible to establish community councils and apply for funds. Forty-seven counties were designated as high priority communities, making them eligible to receive additional technical assistance to encourage them to form councils and submit applications.

Achievements. In July 2001, 15 community councils were established and their plans approved. All will focus on enhancing the quality of early care and education services.

Massachusetts

Name. Community Partnerships for Children

Start Date. The Massachusetts legislature enacted the Community Partnerships for Children initiative in 1993.

Funding and Source. In state fiscal year 2001, the initiative distributed approximately $104 million to communities, including $56.8 million from state general revenue funds and $47.2 million from federal TANF funds. Previously, Community Partnerships for Children was supported entirely with state general revenue funds, totaling as much as $98 million in state fiscal year 2000.

Use of Funds. Communities may use these funds to increase the affordability and accessibility of programs for preschool-age children, including children with disabilities and children of diverse cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds, through the use of a state sliding fee scale; provide early childhood programs and services that are high quality and enhance children's learning; provide comprehensive programs and services such as social, health, and nutrition services, and family education and family literacy; conduct community outreach to families; and enhance collaboration among families, businesses, community programs, and other organizations concerned with children and families to develop a system of early care and education, reduce duplication of services, and promote equitable services across public and private sectors.

Population Served. Children 2.9 years old to age of kindergarten entry and their families with incomes up to 100 percent of the state median income. If all of these children have been served in the community, families earning up to 125 percent of state median income may be served.

Composition of State Board and Role. The Massachusetts Early Childhood Advisory Council to the Department of Education consists of 29 members including, but not limited to, teachers, parents, child care providers, and representatives of state human services agencies, higher education, business, labor, and government. The council is responsible for assessing statewide early childhood trends and needs, and advising and making recommendations regarding legislation, regulations, and guidelines for early childhood education. The council has developed standards for preschool programs funded under the Community Partnerships for Children, curriculum guidelines, and technical assistance guides. The Office of Early Learning Services in the state Department of Education provides staff for the advisory council, offers guidance and technical assistance, approves local plans, and disburses funds to community partnerships. It develops policies regarding the use of funds, determines eligibility and quality standards, oversees local fiscal management, encourages local collaboration, and facilitates statewide evaluation.

Composition of Local Board and Role. Communities are required to constitute new partnerships with a Head Start or child care agency or the local school district as the lead fiscal agent. Each community partnership must include at least 17 members. These include a public school principal, three early care and education providers, three parents of young children, a representative of the local child care resource and referral agency, a representative of the local Head Start agency, a representative of private child care providers in the community (from a preschool, faith-based child care, family child care, or for-profit or nonprofit child care program), two representatives of family child care providers, a representative of the

Massachusetts (continued)

Early Intervention program, a representative of the state Family Network program, a representative of the Parent-Child Home program, and two representatives from among the following four categories: business, medical profession, religious organizations, or senior citizens. The councils must collaboratively develop strategic plans and implement services that promote high quality, comprehensive early care and education through existing services including schools, Head Start, child care programs, and family child care homes. All programs that are funded with CPC dollars must meet the required standards of their own oversight agencies and child care programs must seek accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Family child care providers must seek a Child Development Associate (CDA) degree or become accredited by the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC).

Localities Covered. The initiative funds 169 councils covering 332 of Massachusetts' 351 cities and towns.

Achievements. Community councils have used Community Partnerships for Children dollars to fund professional development that leads to degrees for providers through collaborative arrangements with schools of higher education. They have also supported other quality enhancements such as materials and curriculum development. Councils have expanded slots and extended the length of the day or year that programs serve children, provided scholarships for children to attend full- or part-day programs in public schools, Head Start, or center-based or family child care programs, paid for facilities renovation and construction, and provided comprehensive services including family support, behavioral and mental health programs, and health and dental care through early care and education programs.

North Carolina

Name. Smart Start

Start Date. In 1993, the North Carolina General Assembly approved the state Smart Start initiative to make high quality early care and education services available to all children under the age of six.

Funding and Source. In state fiscal year 2001, Smart Start was supported by $260 million of state general revenue and $55.2 million in private contributions. Since 1999, local partnerships have been required to raise a 15 percent match (10 percent in cash and 5 percent in-kind) for their allocation. In state fiscal year 2002, the state Smart Start budget will be cut by $10.5 million. Partnerships will no longer be allowed to carry over funds from previous years.

Use of Funds. Local Smart Start partnerships must use funds to formulate comprehensive, collaborative, long-range plans to improve the early care and education systems in their communities and oversee the development and implementation of local services. The state requires that local partnerships use at least 30 percent of their funds for child care subsidies for low-income children and at least 70 percent for early care and education. Health and family support activities can make up no more than 30 percent of the funds.

Population Served. Children birth to five years and their families.

Composition of State Board and Role. The North Carolina Partnership for Children is a public-private corporation established to provide state-level leadership for Smart Start and to assist the local partnerships in creating and implementing systems of comprehensive early childhood services suited to the needs of their communities. Its 25-member board of directors, appointed by legislative leaders and the governor, includes early care and education providers, parents, chairs of local boards, and representatives from the business, health care, and philanthropic communities. The partnership establishes statewide benchmarks toward which all local partnerships should direct their planning for children and families. With the state Department of Health and Human Services and a panel of dozens of state leaders in early care and education, state and local government, and the private sector, the partnership reviews and approves local plans and has the authority to adjust allocations to communities on the basis of their success in reaching their objectives. The partnership staff provides technical assistance and guidance, helps to raise private funds for Smart Start, and assists local partnerships in raising private contributions from within their own communities. It must ensure fiscal integrity and accountability for the use of state Smart Start funds and document the progress of local partnerships, including improvements in systems, programs, or services. The partnership has hired independent evaluators from the University of North Carolina to conduct a series of evaluations since Smart Start was first implemented. These have identified good practices in communities and documented local partnerships' effectiveness, helping in turn to increase support and funding for the Smart Start effort statewide as well as locally.

Composition of Local Board and Role. Smart Start communities must form new nonprofit organizations to be their local partnership boards. The boards have at least 21 members from the community. The county manager, a county commissioner, a representative from municipal government, the directors of the local departments of

North Carolina (continued)

Social Services, Health, and Mental Health, the superintendent of public schools, the community college president, the director of the local cooperative extension agency, two business leaders, two parents with preschool-age children receiving child care assistance, a religious leader, a Head Start representative, a center-based child care provider, a family child care provider, and representatives from a child care resource and referral agency or other nonprofit agency related to child care, the local library, a local foundation, and the local Interagency Coordinating Council or a parent of a child with disabilities must be included. Each local partnership is required to establish a nonprofit entity to administer the local Smart Start initiative and funds, and must meet a 15 percent matching requirement. The local partnerships must also plan and implement services and evaluate the success of their programs.

Localities Covered. All 100 counties in North Carolina participate.

Achievements. Local partnerships have used Smart Start funds to help prepare children for school and improve child well-being, providing higher quality child care for more than 294,000 children, creating more than 48,000 new child care spaces, funding early intervention and preventive health screenings for more than 297,000 children, supporting child care subsidies for more than 132,000 children so their parents can work, and helping more than 158,000 parents receive education and resources through home visits, health checks, family literacy services, and materials for the families of every newborn.

South Carolina

Name. First Steps to School Readiness

Start Date. The South Carolina legislature passed the First Steps to School Readiness legislation in 1999.

Funding and Source. In state fiscal year 2001, First Steps was funded with $30 million of state general revenue. First Steps has also raised private contributions, amounting to more than $7 million. Local partnerships are required to contribute a 15 percent match. However, the state board may waive this requirement for counties if they are unable to meet the match.

Use of Funds. Communities may use First Steps funds to increase comprehensive services so children are at reduced risk for major physical, developmental, or learning problems; promote high quality preschool programs that provide a healthy environment and that foster normal growth and development; and mobilize communities to enhance supports for families and their young children so that every child enters school healthy and ready to learn. All child care facilities receiving First Steps funds must first use a portion of their funds to achieve licensed status and then to further enhance quality.

Population Served. Children birth to age of first grade entry and their families.

Composition of State Board and Role. The First Steps state board is chaired by the governor and is composed of 32 other members including the state superintendent of education, 11 representatives from state agencies and organizations, and 20 members appointed by the governor, the president of the Senate, and the speaker of the House. The state board must provide guidance and technical assistance for county partnerships and develop a statewide evaluation strategy. The board is also required to provide leadership and widespread outreach on the initiative, and assist in obtaining private donations to support First Steps at the state and community level.

Composition of Local Board and Role. Counties must pull together a county partnership board as a nonprofit organization. The boards can include as many as 32 members depending on the number of school districts in the community. Board composition is mandated to include four members chosen by the county's delegation to the state legislature as well as representatives from prekindergarten through primary education, family education, child care and early education, a transportation provider, a representative of a nonprofit organization serving young children and families, representatives from the religious and business communities, three parents of preschool-age children, four members from early childhood education, and one representative from each of the following: the county Department of Social Services, the county Department of Health and Environmental Control, Head Start, the county library, and each school district in the county. Each county partnership must develop and implement its strategic plan based on the findings of its resource assessment and use funds to improve the quality of early care and education programs and increase families' access to them.

Localities Covered. All 46 counties participate.

Achievements. County partnerships have funded child care provider training and professional development incentives, helped programs become accredited, supported child care assistance, provided family literacy, parent education, and family support services, and offered health screenings.

Potential Benefits and Hazards

Comprehensive early childhood initiatives hold great promise to expand supports for children and families and improve the delivery of existing services, but only if states: make adequate investments; maintain statewide standards; and sustain investments in multiple strategies to support children and families.

Over the past decade, a number of states have structured a new role for local communities in planning, coordinating, and funding early childhood services. Their purpose is to encourage more comprehensive and effective strategies for supporting children and families and provide a stronger role for communities in decision-making. The nine states profiled in this report charge communities with the responsibility for developing and implementing an early childhood plan designed to connect and improve early childhood resources and to advance broad state goals. Designated local collaborative boards are authorized to use existing and/or additional funds to design a set of strategies based on local needs and priorities.

These state and local partnerships are spurred by growing concern about school readiness and the recognition that children's earliest learning experiences are critical to their future development. Too many children, especially low-income children, are not entering school ready to learn, read, or succeed. Forty-six percent of kindergarten teachers reported that half of their class or more have specific problems with entry into kindergarten, including difficulty following directions, lack of academic skills, disorganized home environments, or difficulty working independently.[1]

"In North Carolina, we have a strong network of all kinds of people completely engaged for young children. Smart Start has helped communities understand what little children need to think and learn."

—An advocate in North Carolina

Early childhood partnership initiatives are intended to address these problems by designing systems to improve children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual well-being and their outlook for success in school. Comprehensive strategies at the local level are free to address an array of concerns: Are children able to concentrate on learning? What uncorrected health issues, such as vision or hearing problems, might interfere with their learning? Do they routinely have adult support to help them develop pre-reading skills? Do their parents have access to parent education activities? Some initiatives have a much broader reach than others. In states such as California, Iowa, and North Carolina, state funding may be used to plan and in some cases implement a broad range of activities important to school readiness and the well-being of children, including child care, prekindergarten programs, family support, home visits, health and mental health services, and parent education. In other states, such as Massachusetts, the focus is primarily on expanding supports for children and families by strengthening child care, Head Start, and prekindergarten programs for children age 2.9 years to the age of kindergarten entry.

Potential Benefits

These state-driven community early childhood initiatives are rooted in a strategic commitment to local planning and collaboration. Nationally, efforts to increase local decision-making have accelerated since the late 1980s. Part of the appeal of community-based planning lies in the belief that the best policy solutions for issues affecting children and families come from the people closest to the problems. Local residents and family members know what the issues are and have the most at stake. Partnership initiatives that provide communities with the flexibility and resources to plan comprehensive strategies to meet local needs have the following potential advantages:

- Providing new resources so communities can build quality and supports
- Accommodating local variation
- Promoting comprehensive services
- Encouraging more connected and accessible service delivery
- Building an early childhood constituency and developing new leadership.

Providing New Resources So Communities Can Build Quality and Supports

Across the nation, early childhood services are sorely underfunded. Only one out of eight eligible children now receives federally funded child care assistance through the Child Care and Development Block Grant.[2] Only three out of five

eligible preschoolers can participate in Head Start.[3] States are constantly making trade-offs between investing in more child care or improving child care. Should they put limited dollars toward making child care more available and affordable so families can work, or should they make sure that the quality of child care and early childhood services is strong and consistently being improved? States do not currently have the resources to achieve either of these goals.

The evidence suggests that quality often takes second place. Programs structured to meet the needs of working families for full-day care are often not designed with adequate attention to early learning. In 31 states, a teacher can begin work in a child care center without any training in early childhood development. In 30 states, family child care providers can offer services without any such training.[4] The average annual salary for providers is $16,350 a year, making it challenging for child care programs to recruit and retain qualified teachers.[5]

Community planning initiatives can generate new resources from policymakers who want to give local communities a stronger voice in addressing these gaps. In some states, these resources have helped to enrich the care offered in child care centers, in family child care homes, and by kith and kin providers. They have financed scholarships in both community and four-year colleges to help providers acquire more training. New resources have also been used to boost the compensation of caregivers, help programs become accredited, buy equipment, hire early reading specialists, and create linkages to community health care programs.

- The early childhood initiative created by Proposition 10 supports community initiatives in all of California's counties. In Alameda County, the local commission has awarded grants to local providers for any inside or outside physical improvements. Providers have used these funds to purchase play equipment and enhance the safety of their playgrounds as well as for building and improving child care facilities. Alameda County also provided training grants for child care providers and program quality improvement grants to support evaluation as well as follow-up to address identified program needs in centers and family child care homes.

- Since its inception and with significant new funding, North Carolina's Smart Start program has been able to help more than 294,000 children enjoy higher quality child care, help more than 297,000 children receive preventive health care, and assist more than 158,000 parents in getting the education and resources they need.

Accommodating Local Variation

Comprehensive early childhood initiatives are designed to promote community-level decision-making by creating state and local partnerships. The intent is for the state to assist communities in building a system of supports that responds to local needs. As states and localities form partnerships, they value variation among communities and recognize the unique issues that each locality faces. Some communities may want to invest a significant amount of local funds to improve child care quality, while others may need to focus new resources on building the supply.

Rural communities, which often lack center-based child care programs, may focus on different methods to build their capacity. The best strategy for one rural area may be to create a network of family child care providers and to strengthen and expand it through technical assistance and support from a resource and referral program. Another area may choose to construct a new child care facility.

- A Mobile Early Childhood program serves San Benito County in California, a sparsely populated county where 50 percent of the children live in rural isolation. In the southern part of the county, there are no child care centers or preschools and all child care is provided in homes. The program supports a bilingual early childhood teacher who travels to remote areas, including migrant worker communities and isolated cattle ranches, to train parents and caregivers on developmental activities for preschoolers that will enhance their kindergarten readiness. School nurses are also part of the team, offering immunizations, early screening programs, and general health and wellness services.

Councils located in more urban areas with large, diverse populations may choose to invest in a broad range of strategies to meet the variety of needs within their communities.

- San Diego County in California uses Proposition 10 funds to support child care and education, child health and wellness activities, and parent education services. The council, which identified child care quality as a concern, provides mini-grants of $50 per child served (up to the licensed capacity) to licensed centers and family child care homes and offers stipends to motivate providers to receive training and upgrade their skills. To reach families from every community in the county, the council funds a well-baby package that is distributed to parents of newborns at all hospitals. Parenting education, family literacy programs, and parent and child mental health services are offered in several languages.

Promoting Comprehensive Services

Most state partnership initiatives are grounded in an important philosophy—in order for children to enter school ready to succeed, they and their families must have access to a comprehensive array of supports. Children need to have positive learning experiences that promote literacy. They also must be healthy, well nourished, and have their parents actively involved in their lives and their learning. As states recognize the value of a broad-based strategy, most have designed their initiatives to respond to the physical, social, and emotional needs of children and families beginning in pregnancy. These efforts have helped child care and other early childhood settings build family support and health services into their programs, and ensured that these services are more accessible.

- The Triad Consolidated Child Care Pilot project outside of Denver, Colorado, and the community partnership in Lowell, Massachusetts, provided comprehensive services for children, coordinating mental health and behavior consultation with preschool and child care programs.

- In Barnwell County, South Carolina, the local First Steps council expanded parenting programs by hiring five additional parent educators to serve the three school districts, expanded a home visitation reading program where trained volunteers introduce children and their parents to reading, and hired a community outreach worker to ensure that children birth to four years of age receive well check-ups, immunizations, and health screening.

- In Scotland County, North Carolina, where the illiteracy rate is over 30 percent and nearly 40 percent of the residents over age 18 do not have a high school diploma or GED, the county Smart Start partnership has expanded parenting and literacy workshops with a focus on improving parents' basic life skills, literacy skills, and parenting techniques that promote children's emotional and intellectual growth. It also has provided funding to the local Department of Social Services to help families pay for child care, implemented dental screenings and outreach for children, and expanded transportation to health care facilities for preschoolers.

- In 2000, the Los Angeles county commission allocated $12 million over three years to support provider training, accreditation activities, and supplemental services such as dental and mental health care in child care settings. The funds will also pay for supplies, equipment, and technical assistance.

Encouraging More Connected and Accessible Service Delivery

State initiatives offer a focal point at the local level for weaving together a variety of separate early childhood supports, including Head Start, child care, and state child care programs. Local councils can use their resources and authority to help these services operate more effectively in unison and create a seamless web of services in which parents and children can find the help they need.

Localities often offer both Head Start and prekindergarten programs. These programs can provide high quality early education, but they frequently only operate on a part-day, part-year basis. Local councils can tie together all sources of funding and use additional state initiative funds to provide full-day, full-year support for children in Head Start and prekindergarten programs. The Lakes Area Community Empowerment district in Iowa has done just that. The local council has successfully used state funding to expand Head Start to full-day and to provide scholarships to Head Start-eligible children who previously were not served.

Local councils can enhance families' access to programs by ensuring that resource and referral programs inform families about all of the early childhood options in their communities and by creating one-stop locations where families can apply for multiple services. The First Steps council in Barnwell County, South Carolina established a "One Stop Shop" where several human service providers are located along with a high quality child care center, a lending library, and a resource center for parents.

Building an Early Childhood Constituency and Developing New Leadership

Unlike the public school system, early childhood programs have no central entity around which to galvanize a community. As a result, many citizens, as well as opinion makers including local officials and business leaders, do not fully understand the importance of high quality early childhood services to communities or the challenges inherent in providing them. The activities of local councils can do a great deal to draw the community's attention to issues facing young children and communicate how important a strong start in learning is to later school success. The involvement of business leaders, parents, and other community representatives helps strengthen that understanding, develop realistic strategies that take into account the capacity of local agencies, and build a constituency committed to sound early childhood investments and policies, with the authority to implement them.

Potential Hazards

While these initiatives hold promise, states should proceed with caution when developing a locally based early childhood planning project. The state experience described in this report suggests several potential hazards. In particular, states should avoid:

- Substituting collaborative planning for new financial investments
- Abrogating state responsibility for establishing minimum standards and improvements
- Viewing community planning initiatives as the panacea for meeting early childhood needs
- Underestimating the local costs incurred
- Creating duplicative systems.

Substituting Collaborative Planning for New Financial Investments

Some policymakers may assume that efforts to link existing resources may so effectively increase efficiency that no additional funding will be needed. However, collaboration alone cannot cure an underfunded system. While linkage is valuable, experience suggests that comprehensive planning routinely uncovers serious service gaps that cannot be addressed without substantial new resources. Some communities may successfully tap new sources of local revenue, but this is usually not enough to meet the need. Without significant state support, no amount of increased efficiency will ensure that most communities, especially those among the poorest, will be able to finance the full range of supports children and families need. States such as Colorado, Florida, and Kentucky that do not provide substantial ongoing funding for local implementation are clearly limited in what they can reasonably expect communities to accomplish.

Abrogating State Responsibility for Establishing Minimum Standards and Improvements

States may see community planning efforts as an opportunity to devolve *all* decision-making and accountability to the local level. However, in order to protect children, encourage accountability for the use of state funds, and ensure equity, states must set minimum standards governing early childhood policy and practice. If no child is to be left behind, states must also continue to raise quality by investing in and improving policies for child care, prekindergarten, and other early childhood programs. For example, there should be adequate eligibility levels for child care assistance set by states that no community can fall below. A minimum level for rates paid to child care providers serving children who receive public funds should

also be set by the states to ensure that all families have access to a choice of quality child care providers. Strong state licensing standards must be in place to ensure the health, safety, and sound development of children. Communities should have the flexibility to set more generous policies but they should not be able to provide less than the state requires.

Viewing Community Planning Initiatives as the Panacea for Meeting Early Childhood Needs

States should avoid putting all their eggs in one basket. Comprehensive early childhood initiatives should not be seen as an opportunity to collapse or eliminate effective statewide programs that offer essential services such as prekindergarten or family support to all families. In restructuring their early childhood services and programs, local councils should not unwittingly break apart the fragile system of supports that may exist.

The consequences of relying solely on local initiatives are now playing out in Florida. In 2001, the legislature repealed a series of statutes affecting young children including those supporting statewide prekindergarten and a Gold Seal three-tiered rating system that tied reimbursements for subsidized child care providers to the quality of service offered. Starting in 2002, monies for these programs will be given directly to counties, which will have discretion over whether or not to continue offering these programs.[6]

Underestimating the Local Costs Incurred

Local collaborative planning has the potential to build awareness about early childhood issues and mobilize a strong constituency. However, collaboration is extremely time consuming. Participation can be burdensome for members with unrelated full-time jobs, especially parents, small business owners, and corporate leaders. It can also be a major new responsibility for members representing early childhood programs who operate on tight budgets with small staffs. In addition, some agency representatives may be asked to serve on multiple councils if their organizations provide services in more than one local planning district.

Florida's local councils are responsible for administering the child care subsidy system and prekindergarten, as well as smaller programs. These responsibilities have overwhelmed the capacity of a number of local councils.

Participants are often willing to make substantial commitments of time, but they expect that supportive state policies and the resources necessary to

implement their plans will match their investments. Disillusionment sets in quickly when they do not.

Creating Duplicative Systems

In an attempt to meet families' needs, a local council may decide to offer certain services itself. It could allow families to apply for child care assistance directly through the local initiative. It may also offer more generous policies such as higher reimbursement rates to participating providers to expand families' quality child care choices. However, if the new system is not coordinated with existing services, it may result in confusion and unintended consequences for families.

In Massachusetts, local Community Partnerships for Children (CPC) councils sought to increase access to child care help by creating a new child care assistance program that seemed to parallel the state's program provided by the Office of Child Care Services (OCCS). This program was different in two ways. Rates paid to child care providers through CPC were often higher than rates paid through the Office of Child Care Services, and children were eligible from the age of 2.9 until they were eligible to enter kindergarten.

Upon kindergarten entry, children only qualified for the OCCS assistance, which is available until a child is 13 years old. Unfortunately, a smooth transition from the CPC system to the OCCS system did not always occur. Families receiving CPC assistance were often not on the waiting list for OCCS child care or may have actually taken their names off when they received a CPC subsidy. While they received a higher subsidy for their younger children, they were not able to receive any help paying for child care when their children reached school age.

Summary

Many states are interested in adding to and bolstering early childhood education and support services in their communities. Using a comprehensive early childhood initiative to foster planning and implementation is one important way to accomplish this goal. But the considerable advantages are not risk- or cost-free. The following sections draw on varied state and local experience to help states focus on several specific areas and related actions that together can help build an enduring, flexible system of education and care for young children.

A Blueprint for State-Driven Local Initiatives

State-driven local initiatives offer communities an expanded opportunity to design comprehensive early childhood supports. These initiatives can make a real difference for young children and their families provided that they are adequately funded and staffed, driven by leaders who understand and support collaborative planning and implementation, implemented with realistic expectations, and maintain the state's role as guarantor of equal services to all children.

By their nature, community planning initiatives differ by state and locality. But regardless of their approach, all initiatives must have certain elements in place if they are to reach their full potential and improve the lives of children and families. Effective state-driven community planning initiatives have a number of components in common: strong state and local governance structures, the ability to build broad constituencies and support local capacity, clear guidelines, adequate resources and flexible spending policies, results-driven planning, and sound evaluation strategies.

Create Strong State Governance

State-driven community planning initiatives demand strong governance structures at the state and local levels to facilitate planning and ensure programmatic and fiscal responsibility. States should:

- Support strong and well-staffed organizational structures at the state and local levels to administer community planning initiatives

- Create, if feasible, a new agency to govern the initiative at the state level with the ability to focus its complete attention on the needs of children age zero to five with strong ties to the governor and existing agencies
- Require the state governing agency to select a diverse board that includes, at a minimum, heads of state agencies responsible for children and families, local early care and education providers, health care and family support providers, parents, and representatives of the business community
- Provide sufficient resources to the state board so that it has the capacity to support the community planning process and build widespread public support for investments in young children and families
- Provide authority for the state governing board to review local plans and to deny state funds to plans that do not meet criteria set out in state guidelines or that are not producing desired outcomes.

Build Broad Constituencies

States can establish guidelines to encourage broad membership on local councils, create ample opportunities for public input into community plans, and build public support for the initiative. States should:

- Ensure that local councils have a broad membership by including representatives of local agencies concerned with children and families, parents, early childhood providers, children's advocates, community leaders, pediatricians and other health care providers, members of the business community, representatives of family support programs, and others concerned with young children
- Establish a state review process to ensure diverse membership on local community planning councils
- Create a climate that encourages full participation among all board members
- Require communities to foster public support and input by soliciting the views of diverse community members and targeting hard-to-reach families
- Ensure an inclusive approach on community councils by constructing guidelines that limit the potential for conflict of interest but do not exclude members who bring an understanding of the needs of young children and their families
- Establish policies and procedures to manage conflict of interest such as having members of state boards or local councils abstain from votes that could benefit their agencies.

Identify and Support Local Capacity

Local councils require both adequate resources to plan programs and supports for children and families and to administer their initiative in the community. States should:

- Provide adequate resources to local communities for skilled staff to lead planning, implementation, and evaluation efforts, and ensure fiscal and programmatic accountability
- Make knowledgeable state-level staff and consultants available to provide start-up and ongoing technical assistance to local councils through a variety of approaches such as on-site training, state and regional meetings, Web sites, and phone calls.

Establish Clear Guidelines

While flexibility to decide what services are best suited to children and families in their communities is a strength of community planning initiatives, local councils require guidance to develop plans that are comprehensive in scope, aimed at specific results, and consistent with the state initiative's overall goals. States should:

- Set parameters on the size, structure, and composition of local councils
- Establish guidelines for communities for developing a local plan based on a careful assessment of community needs and resources
- Set guidelines that encourage communities to build on, but not duplicate or supplant, existing efforts
- Establish guidelines for ensuring that communities select a fiscal agent that has the capability to meet fiscal accounting standards set by the state and experience with administering multiple funding streams
- Establish guidelines that allow maximum local autonomy while ensuring that local plans meet required state objectives.

Invest Adequate Resources to Support Children and Families

Local councils require sufficient new resources to address the varied needs identified by community planning efforts. Simply making programs more efficient will not free enough resources to meet community needs. States should:

- Commit substantial new dollars from the start to ensure sustainable and sufficient funding for councils to fill the gap between needs and resources and improve supports for children and families
- Establish a funding formula that ensures adequate funds to make a measurable impact in all communities participating in the initiative
- Ensure that the process for distributing funds is designed to reach a variety of communities with a wide range of needs and resources
- Provide more dollars to economically depressed communities with greater needs and fewer resources
- Establish realistic matching requirements that allow an in-kind as well as a cash match
- Encourage strategic, efficient, and creative use of state dollars by allowing localities to spend funds on one-time-only expenditures as well as on facilities and to carry forward unspent funds
- Allow reallocations of unspent funds among local councils.

Link Planning to Accountability

Local programs and services must be planned and implemented in a manner that meets the needs of children and families in a community, and simultaneously fulfills the state's goal of improving young children's well-being and readiness for school. States should:

- Begin with a clearly defined goal in mind
- Develop state-level results and indicators that are developmentally appropriate for children
- Set programmatic performance goals
- Encourage local councils to use current data where they exist or provide technical assistance, funding, and guidance on how to conduct a data collection effort
- Encourage local councils to take advantage of the expertise of a broad range of members of the community in developing their plan
- Allow local councils sufficient time for their results-based planning efforts
- Provide technical assistance and funding for results-based planning
- Review and approve local plans to ensure they are results-based prior to implementation
- Encourage local councils to reflect on and revise their plans as the initiative progresses

- Encourage local councils to conduct consumer satisfaction surveys to understand how supports are working for children and families
- Require local councils to report regularly on program status to the legislature, executive branch, and local programs and ensure that such information is available to the public.

Understand the Potential and Limits of Evaluation

Community planning initiatives should include a statewide evaluation process to gather information on community-level changes, program effectiveness, and the impact on children and families. States should:

- Establish state and local benchmarks at the beginning of the project
- Work with independent experts to develop an evaluation component that indicates whether local initiatives are moving toward meeting benchmarks
- Distinguish between process and outcome evaluations
- Only conduct outcome evaluations of mature programs
- Carefully consider how to address programs that fall short of goals defined by the state and local councils
- Provide technical assistance to programs that are not meeting the benchmarks as well as programs that need help in taking the next steps
- Use evaluations as a tool to guide programs in continuously improving their supports to children and families
- Understand local circumstances and shape policy accordingly
- Emphasize short-term accomplishments
- Consider multiple perspectives and innovative data collection tools
- Encourage evaluation techniques that do no harm by ensuring that results cannot be traced back to a particular child or program
- Interpret results of evaluation with great caution
- Only expect major changes from major investments.

Create Strong State Governance

This section considers the various entities states have chosen to lead their initiatives and the importance of structuring an entity with adequate capacity to support local councils. A state board establishes its authority through a diverse and broad-based membership, strong leadership, and a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities to local councils. Adequate resources to support its work administratively and programmatically are essential.

To meet their potential, state and local partnership strategies must be led by governing bodies with the expertise, authority, and resources necessary to fully staff and administer their work to sustain and expand support for the broad initiative—while fostering local decision-making and implementation. State boards must have the capacity to:

- Develop timely regulations and guidelines
- Manage requests for proposals
- Provide technical support and training
- Identify implementation barriers, as well as best practices
- Communicate the initiative's importance and successes to a wide audience.

They must also have the authority to:

- Review and approve local plans
- Revise guidelines and state expectations when appropriate
- Negotiate policy changes at the state level when necessary to ease local implementation
- Take action to ensure accountability
- Obtain the resources needed to fully staff and administer their work.

"Before First Steps, no one was looking at the whole early childhood picture. Each agency saw its own piece of the picture. The governor's office had a division focusing on children zero to 18, which could not give undivided attention to children age zero to five like First Steps now can."

—A state leader in South Carolina

Structure a State Entity with Adequate Capacity

State-driven community early childhood initiatives are designed to create state and local partnerships that share power and responsibility and promote local autonomy to make decisions about how to best spend resources to improve services for children and families, rather than relying on more traditional top-down authority. However, they do require strong state-level support to be successful. The state-level organizational structures of these new state-local relationships can take several shapes. Some general types are discussed below.

State boards must have the organizational ability necessary to support local councils. The auspices under which state initiatives operate vary, although in every case the goal is the same: to create an expertly staffed, flexible, and highly credible governing entity. Some states have chosen to create a new, free-standing governing body with the authority to disburse state funds to local communities. Others administer their initiatives through an existing agency. Cross-agency oversight through consolidated governance offers another alternative. Each approach has advantages and limitations. Deciding which one is best will depend on the initiative's immediate requirements and state circumstances. As state experience develops and circumstances change, organizational structure may alter as well.

Option 1: A Newly Created, Independent Board

Several states, including California, Iowa, Kentucky, North Carolina, and South Carolina, have chosen to create entirely new entities to lead their initiatives. This approach has several advantages. A newly created state board has no pre-existing organizational agenda or vested interest in retaining any existing programs or policies that might conflict with the initiative's efforts. If the board is perceived as a neutral third party, it may be able to promote community decision-making by providing a forum in which agencies can move beyond potentially harmful turf issues. An autonomous and independent board also demonstrates a commitment by the state to the issues of young children ages zero to five and helps to establish the initiative's credibility.

However, newly formed state entities require high visibility and strong support from the governor or legislature. As the organizational "new kid on the block" and often the one with the fewest resources at its disposal, a newly created independent board may find it difficult to build relationships with other state agencies and gain the respect and trust of community partnerships. They also must be cautious to avoid duplicating the efforts of existing agencies for

children and families. In addition, new state boards face the cumbersome task of developing their own organizational capacity while simultaneously helping to build local councils. This can be especially difficult if they are not given time and resources to establish themselves at the outset. Experience suggests that state boards as well as local councils benefit from phased-in responsibility.

- In North Carolina, Smart Start moved cautiously toward the creation of an independent state-level entity, giving it time to develop its capacity to stand alone. In 1993, the state authorized the Division of Child Development within the existing Department of Human Services to implement the legislation, write the regulations, hire program staff, and set up a request-for-proposals process to select the first 12 demonstration counties that would receive Smart Start funds. The Department of Human Services had completed much of the groundwork, including the development of a statewide selection process for the first 12 pilot sites, a resource assessment for each of the 100 counties in North Carolina, the establishment of procedures for administration of funds and contracts, and the provision of technical assistance to the pilot sites. In addition to facilitating the start-up of the Smart Start program, the Division of Child Development administered the state's child care subsidies as well as other programs serving young children.

  At the same time, the Smart Start legislation created a nonprofit organization, the North Carolina Partnership for Children, as the state-level policy board to provide oversight and integration of the local county partnerships. In 1996, full administration of the Smart Start program and responsibility for technical assistance was transferred from the Division of Child Development to the state Partnership for Children. Responsibility for child care subsidy administration and other programs serving young children remained with the Department of Human Services.

- South Carolina's First Steps initiative is led by a new state Office of First Steps to School Readiness, a public-private organization. Its board is chaired by the governor and includes representatives appointed by the governor and legislature. "Before First Steps, no one was looking at the whole early childhood picture. Each agency saw its own piece of the picture. The governor's office had a division focusing on children zero to 18, which could not give undivided attention to children age zero to five like First Steps now can," according to a state leader in South Carolina.

- Kentucky's Early Childhood Development Authority is a 17-member board with authority to allocate $1.6 million in tobacco funds to local councils for early childhood projects. The newly created board consolidates into a single

body all of the early childhood advisory councils that were providing separate advice to different state-level cabinets.

Option 2: An Existing Lead Agency

Creating a new agency is not always a viable choice. Some states may choose to operate their initiative under the auspices of an existing state agency or established organization. This decision can decrease the amount of time that state boards will need to develop the administrative capacity and expertise required to oversee the initiative and assist local councils. States that select existing organizations equipped with professional staff and a strong infrastructure can move fairly quickly from start-up to planning and implementation. Evaluation, accountability, and fiscal management systems are already in place. An existing agency may also have considerable political clout based on established relationships with the legislature, the governor's office, and other stakeholders.

States considering this approach should recognize its limitations and carefully evaluate the expertise, flexibility, and credibility that oversight by an existing agency offers. First, an established agency has its own mission and vested interests. These will typically take precedence over those of the initiative if there is a conflict or if a choice must be made. For example, an organization may agree to lead a complex and ambitious state initiative, but if it is expected to do so with only minimal new resources, it will focus its efforts first on meeting its pre-existing goals and objectives. Second, established organizations have well-developed internal cultures and ways of doing business. These may be quite different from the preferred approach for the initiative and make it difficult to maintain flexibility and responsiveness to local needs. Third, existing relationships with politically valuable partners may, on closer examination, turn out to be weak or even fractious. Fourth, it may be more challenging to bring other partners to the table if they do not have prior relationships with the agency. States should look for a close match between the initiative and the proposed lead agency in both mission and guiding principles; an efficient operational infrastructure; and enough "give" in the organization to take on new obligations. When these are in place, oversight by an existing lead agency can help ensure that the state initiative will be quick off the mark and that start-up efforts focus on building local rather than state capacity.

- Massachusetts chose the Department of Education to take the lead role in its Community Partnerships for Children. Within the state's Department of Education, the Office of Early Learning Services provides guidance, technical assistance, and evaluation services to 169 local partnerships. The local school department usually plays a major role in each of the community

partnerships, sometimes acting as the fiscal agent (child care or Head Start agencies may also be fiscal agents) and always participating in the local partnerships. The Department of Education facilitates the collaboration of the school department, child care, Head Start, and other partnership members through ongoing guidance. By basing its initiative in a strong existing state agency with branches in every local community, Massachusetts chose a strategic and effective way to rapidly implement its Community Partnerships program at the local level in communities across the state.

Option 3: Consolidated Governance

A third governance approach integrates functions from a variety of agencies or divisions. This approach actually gives a new agency or organization the responsibility for existing state children's programs as well as the new initiative. In this highly collaborative method, partners share existing resources and develop a single set of regulations and operational procedures in order to oversee the initiative. This kind of agency integration at the state level has the advantage of making it much easier for agencies to coordinate their efforts at the local level. However, consolidating functions across bureaucracies is challenging even among agencies with shared interests and commitment, and especially among those without a history of successful collaboration. State initiatives that attempt to consolidate state-level governance may find it difficult to simultaneously support the growth and development of local councils.

- Florida's Partnership for School Readiness attempted to promote a more coordinated administration system for early childhood. The law created a new state agency initially within the governor's office and consolidated the administration of the major early care and education programs (child care, prekindergarten, and other smaller early education programs) from two departments. The state partnership's small staff struggled to develop guidelines and provide technical assistance to fledgling local partnerships, while at the same time attempting to consolidate the administration and funding of programs previously housed in two state agencies. In 2001, the effort was moved from the governor's office to the Agency for Workforce Innovation, a move that threatens to diminish the emphasis on school readiness.

Establish Authority

In order to meet their objectives, state boards need authority—the legal power to make decisions; the perceived legitimacy necessary to influence others; and the resources to carry through with the initiative. Usually, authority is conveyed

most clearly by an institutionalized set of rules, duties, and predictable behaviors, and buttressed by the power of the purse. But because cross-sector state initiatives are such a new and developing form, state boards may need to work to establish their authority.

State early childhood initiatives typically operate with some degree of legal mandate, either gubernatorial, legislative, or electoral. A few have the added advantage of considerable budgets. Most, however, enjoy very little institutionalized or automatically received authority. Whether state initiatives are led by a newly created independent board, an existing agency, or some other entity, they are charged with establishing a new set of duties and relationships with localities. Authority is most likely to develop when membership reflects a cross-section of the community; when initiatives have the initial support of an influential champion; when there is a clear, predictable, and appropriate scope of power shared between the state and local councils; and when states and local communities have adequate funding.

Decide Who Sits on the State Board

In most cases, representatives from the governor's office, the state legislature, the heads of the state health, human services, and education agencies, and representatives of the early childhood community sit on the state board. However, certain groups, most often community providers, may be excluded from state and local boards to avoid conflict of interest. This deprives the board of an opportunity to learn from the people closest to the needs of young children. An expert from Massachusetts believes that excluding providers is a mistake at either the state or local level: "Not including providers is almost like setting it up so that things will not change." Massachusetts' enabling legislation for the Community Partnerships for Children program established a state advisory council that may include child care and Head Start providers, parents, and representatives from state human service agencies, higher education, business, labor, and government. Advocates in North Carolina also believe that it is important to include providers as partners at the state level. In South Carolina, there is a provision for members of the child care or medical community to be appointed to the state board.

- Kentucky has no providers who offer direct services on its state board, by design. A child advocate does sit on the board. Providers are able to provide input through advisory workgroups that are established to gather information and make recommendations on particular areas that the state board may choose to fund.

- Florida's original legislation stated that no person who is currently a provider in the early care and education industry may sit on the state board. However, during the last legislative session, the composition of the state board was expanded to include two representatives from child care. Local councils are mandated to have representatives from the fields of child care, Head Start, and early education.

Ensure Ongoing Leadership

Both in the early days of an initiative and during the beginning stages of implementation, perceived authority can be greatly enhanced by strong leadership from a major figure. Governors, for example, have effectively championed the cause of early childhood and launched initiatives in several states. Their continuing support provides a young initiative with resources and publicity while it grows its own legs. However, since administrations and political priorities change, purposeful efforts to strengthen initiatives' own internal authority are essential. Ultimately, an initiative's authority will depend on the actions states take and the ownership they build within the community, among taxpayers, funders, and legislators.

- The cash benefits of strong gubernatorial support are especially clear in North Carolina. As one participant observed: "We could never have gotten $330 million without the governor." However, as Smart Start has become a well-known and successful fixture in all of North Carolina's counties, the program's natural base of support—families and local decision makers—has widened and the governor has not needed to play such a visible role. Now that there is a new governor, Smart Start after eight years of strong leadership is still a highly popular bipartisan program.

- In California, leadership of the initiative resides outside of the governor's office or the legislature. Local planning commissions were developed as a result of a ballot proposition campaign led by Rob Reiner, a well-known actor and movie director. Funds go directly to the California Children and Families Commission, which is chaired by Reiner, an appointee of the governor, with administrative support for the newly created state agency. Neither the governor nor legislature has direct authority over the level of funding. The new state agency must operate within the confines of the government code and is responsible for providing visibility for local efforts to develop comprehensive health, education, and family support services for children from birth to five and their families.

- In Florida, leadership for the Partnership for School Readiness initiative rested with an outgoing governor and two state legislators. After the initiative was enacted, the governor retired and, because of term limits, the legislators left office. With no champion, new funding for the initiative that local councils had hoped for was not forthcoming.

Establish a Clear and Predictable Scope of Power

Perhaps the most important way for state initiatives to establish authority is by defining the scope of their power in relation to the state and localities and operating consistently within those boundaries. Clear and timely operational guidelines are essential. (For further discussion of guidelines, see Chapter 5: *Establish Clear Guidelines for Local Councils*.)

Defining respective roles and responsibilities creates a framework within which new "top-down/bottom-up" relationships with localities can develop. Most states, for example, give responsibility to localities to develop a plan, but maintain the state's authority to reject or refuse to fund plans that do not meet state guidelines. This clarification establishes the grounds for a shared partnership. Every state board profiled in this report reviews local plans to ensure that their goals are consistent with the state initiative's mission. All except California also have the authority to approve or disapprove local plans. Experience suggests that clear, predictable, and appropriate use of this authority fosters local autonomy and strengthens the initiative at both the state and local level.

A state-level review of local plans is a first step toward holding local councils programmatically and fiscally accountable. The review process provides the state with baseline data from which it can evaluate the effectiveness of local programs and services and the extent of technical assistance that is needed. It ensures that local councils meet the broad-based representation requirements that are essential for collaboration and that they address all of the areas—early care and education, health, and family support—required by the state and necessary to support children and families.

While states must be willing to deny funding when the situation warrants, in many cases taking a middle position between outright rejection and approval is more useful. A conditional approval ensures a community's annual allocation, but encourages the council to reevaluate its plans. Councils can begin implementing any strategies that were approved, take advantage of technical assistance the state may have to offer, and keep the process moving forward. This is especially important for new councils that are trying to plan and implement in rapid succession and do not want to lose momentum.

- In one of the largest cities in North Carolina, several board members in the local partnership with links to the public school system voted in a block to fund prekindergarten in the public schools using $3 million of Smart Start funds. Their project had no role for child care and Head Start agencies with experience in working with young children. The plan was reviewed and disallowed at the state level because there was no collaboration. An advocate in North Carolina says that "state boards need to watch very carefully and have to be firm. They have to be willing to say 'no' when it's time to say 'no' and prevent the devolution of local planning into a situation where people slice and dice the dollars."

- Florida has the authority to reject plans. Although the state board has not rejected any outright, in the initiative's first year, it approved 43 plans pending "more information." Only 14 plans were initially approved.

Provide Adequate Administrative Resources

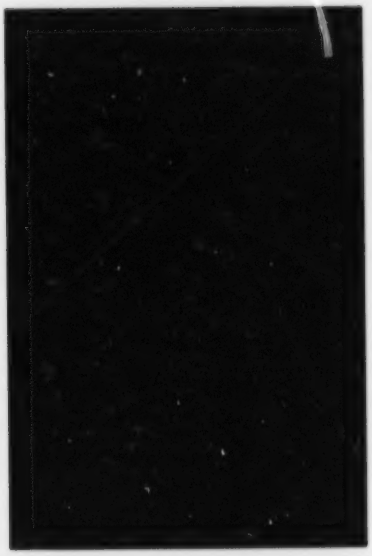
Regardless of the extent of their legal authority, the success of early childhood initiatives is directly linked to how well they are funded. To lead their initiatives, state boards must have adequate resources from the beginning. A full-time professional staff is needed to develop regulations and guidelines, administer the request for proposal process, provide technical support and training to local councils, review local plans and recommend them to the state board for approval, lead oversight and evaluation efforts, and build widespread support for the initiative. The costs of clerical support, consultants, administration, data collection systems, travel, and publicity must also be covered at the state level. Although localities all need new state funds to bolster program quality as well as to support the planning process, initiatives will not survive without adequate administrative support at the state and local levels.

- The California Children and Families Act (Proposition 10) has provided 20 percent of the initiative's $1.6 billion funding through June 2001 to the state commission for expenditures specifically in the areas of media, research, child care, and education. The state commission uses most of these funds to enhance local programming; to support research and development, including evaluation; and to provide training and technical assistance. Included in this 20 percent are funds for administration of the state commission, not to exceed 1 percent of total Proposition 10 funds. This administrative fund ensures that the state commission has the support of a core state agency staff.

A project of this size and this importance requires support and leadership at the state level. The significance of this project is too great to *not* support it fully with staff and other resources at the state level.

- In state fiscal year 2001, the North Carolina Partnership for Children received $6 million to support Smart Start at the state level. To oversee and provide guidance to the local partnerships, the state office includes a staff of 60. In addition, the state Division of Child Development has funds available to contract with the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina to evaluate the local partnerships' achievements and identify best practices statewide.

- In the first year of Florida's initiative, the state partnership only had three full-time and two temporary staff members. During the first six months of the initiative, this limited staff was charged with organizing local coalitions, establishing a process for coalitions to submit plans, and reviewing and approving plans. It was also responsible for making recommendations concerning a trust fund for the inclusion of all early care and education funds, and a system for moving these funds to the local coalitions, the adoption of school readiness performance standards, a system for measuring school readiness, and a uniform screening for all children entering kindergarten. While nine additional staff members from the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Education were co-located with the partnership during the second year, they were focused on programs, and no accounting or administrative staff were made available.



Establish Clear Guidelines for Local Councils

Clear, timely, and flexible state guidance is essential if local councils are to develop into strong and effective planning and implementation boards. The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure maximum local autonomy while meeting required state objectives. This section discusses the role and importance of local councils. It also describes various state criteria for localities regarding the structure, size, and composition of local councils; planning; and fiscal accountability procedures. It addresses the importance of effectively communicating guidelines as well.

State-driven comprehensive early childhood initiatives are designed to improve outcomes for children by making it easier for localities to collaborate across sectors to determine needs, set priorities, and direct a variety of resources where they believe they will do the most good. While a state-level governing body helps to establish, fund, guide, and evaluate the entire initiative, local councils are the heart of these initiatives. They are charged with many responsibilities, including:

- Leading the effort to plan and implement comprehensive early childhood services that meet the needs of children age birth to five and their families in the community
- Conducting community needs and resource assessments
- Allocating and capturing funds to achieve their desired outcomes
- Contracting directly with service providers to implement their plans, or running local programs themselves

States have to be extremely clear about who should sit on local councils, and how decisions should be made. State boards should then have authority to review and reject plans that do not meet the criteria.

- Conducting annual planning and evaluation
- Maintaining fiscal and programmatic accountability.

Legislative language often establishes the state's broad vision and goals. To ensure that localities understand what is expected of them, and that local efforts are consistent with state goals, states need to establish and adequately convey clear guidelines for local councils. States should have the ability to reject or request changes in local plans in which activities do not advance the state's mission.

As local councils begin their efforts, written guidelines provided by the state can be helpful in reinforcing the essential elements of the initiative and laying the groundwork for measuring success. Guidelines allow the state board to spell out its relationship to local councils and define the extent of local autonomy to plan and implement services in their communities. They provide localities with a clear sense of direction and, when combined with initial training and ongoing technical assistance, can keep localities on track. Guidelines can flesh out broadly written legislative language and have the advantage of being much more easily revised when necessary.

By and large, states have recognized the need for clear guidelines. Ideally, guidelines are developed and issued to communities before they decide to apply for funding or are selected to participate. Advance knowledge of what is required can help communities more effectively evaluate their own readiness and decide whether and where they need to do more pre-application work. Without guidelines, a local council could spend time designing activities beyond the scope of the state's initiative, or without clear strategies for community-level improvement, only to have them rejected when reviewed by the state board.

However, political pressures, legislative deadlines, and their own limited experience with local comprehensive early childhood efforts have made it difficult for states to offer as much up-front clarity as localities want and need. Often legislation requires that local communities begin planning immediately after the initiative is enacted and funds appropriated—sometimes before a state office with sufficient capacity to develop adequate guidelines has gotten off the ground.

Most states have made efforts to provide direction in at least two broad areas: the structure and composition of local councils and creating an action plan. The following sections describe state efforts in each of these areas and illustrate the challenges that developing adequate guidelines can pose.

Establish Local Councils

Most communities, especially those with little experience in collaborative planning, will require guidance on how to establish and organize their local councils. Recognizing this, states often offer assistance to help local councils get started. Massachusetts provides the following guidance on how to establish council leadership and organize a local council in its *Guide to Community Partnerships for Children*:

> "The individual or organization that initiates the council is important because they are responsible for fostering council leadership. Having co-chairpersons who represent different perspectives can be helpful as this leadership structure helps to develop a collaborative spirit. Ideally, the chairperson(s) should have leadership experience in committee organization. Having co-chairs also provides parents with opportunities to assume leadership. To ensure a balance of power in the collaborative process, representatives of the lead agency [the agency that administers the funding for the local council] are discouraged from chairing or co-chairing councils."

In the guide, Massachusetts recommends the following steps for organizing a local council:

- Identify established councils and take steps to merge or combine councils
- Identify potential council representatives of parents, providers of early care and education, business, and others in the community
- Determine an appropriate invitational or selection method
- Plan an organizational meeting and develop the agenda
- Conduct the organizational meeting
- Identify roles and responsibilities
- Articulate the council's mission
- Develop goals and objectives that are well-defined and achievable.

Set Parameters on the Structure, Size, and Composition of Local Councils

The structure, size, and composition of local councils are usually mandated in broad terms by state legislation. Guidelines that address structure and membership must be flexible enough to allow councils to take full advantage of existing resources; recognize local constraints; and ensure that state resources are well-used. As they craft guidelines, states should think carefully about local

variations that might affect implementation and the costs they might incur. Localities must also decide which structure works best for them.

Structure of Local Councils

Rather than using an existing local agency to lead the initiative, nearly all states have decided that it is most productive to begin planning for comprehensive community services through new local councils with broad membership that draws knowledge and expertise from several different sectors, involves parents, and helps to build widespread buy-in from the community.

States differ in their direction to localities about the actual structure of their local councils. There is often, but not always, similarity in state and local organizational structures. In North Carolina and South Carolina, guidelines require that newly formed, independent 501(c)(3) organizations lead and administer the initiative at the local level, as they do at the state level. Other states allow communities to select existing agencies to manage all or part of the initiative. In Colorado and Massachusetts, the local council is the decision-making and planning body, but the administrative functions are provided by a separate agency. (The pros and cons of various organizational structures are discussed in Chapter 4: *Create Strong State Governance*.) The lessons regarding different types of structures at the state level apply to the local level as well.

When states do set specific requirements, they should give serious thought to what will be required for localities to meet these expectations, both in terms of local effort and additional state support. Not everything that is desirable may be possible with the resources available to communities. For example, most states feel that the local organization in charge of administering the initiative should not provide direct services. Doing so might create competition with existing providers and dampen the community's collaborative spirit. However, complying with this requirement may not always be feasible. In rural and sparsely populated counties with few community agencies, there may be limited non-provider agencies with the necessary interest and expertise from which to choose.

Requirements about the kind of local structure localities should choose can also have long-lasting financial repercussions.

- When Smart Start was implemented in 1993, North Carolina decided that localities should develop new partnerships that would both lead the planning and implementation process and administer the grant. "In the beginning there

is a lot of suspicion and mistrust about who is going to own the initiative, and if it is owned collectively by everybody, there is more trust in the organization," said one representative. To support its decision, North Carolina's state office has established and sustained 501(c)(3) status for 81 local partnerships, sometimes for tiny organizations with relatively few funds. This has turned out to be an unexpectedly demanding commitment and a steady drain on resources. According to one state staffer: "In hindsight, we would have liked to have used that energy much more strategically to develop programs" rather than to create and shore up new organizations.

- Colorado's guidelines permit each council to decide the best organization to administer local efforts and allow representatives of managing agencies to serve as members of the local council. The pilots have variously chosen direct service providers; resource and referral agencies; and county departments of human services to manage their work. Triad Early Childhood Council, the tri-county Consolidated Child Care pilot in Clear Creek, Gilpin, and Jefferson Counties near Denver, designated an existing child care resource and referral agency to operate its council. The agency shared the council's mission to build child care capacity, improve child care quality, and enhance services for low-income children. Local leaders believed that choosing an existing organization made more funding available for programs, as most of the child care resource and referral agency's administrative costs were already covered.

Local Council Membership

Most states encourage broad community representation in local councils. (For a related discussion of cross-sector participation and a summary of local membership requirements see Chapter 6: *Build Broad Constituencies Across Sectors*.) They usually dictate the sectors to be included and even the proportion of local representatives that can be drawn from each. Some go further and specify the particular kind of organizations and positions that must be represented—a Head Start director or school board member in Florida, for example.

It is important that council membership be composed of a large number of diverse community members so that multiple viewpoints about the needs of children and families are reflected in the councils' decisions. Although there is wide variation, most states also set some parameters on the size of local councils. California allows councils to be as small as five members, while South Carolina requires as many as 32 members in some districts. Such guidelines should strike a balance between ensuring broad community representation and a manageable organizational size. Setting a high minimum encourages more comprehensive

A very small council may appear elitist, or non representative. It could also exclude parents and community members with a strong understanding of children's and families' needs, and as a result fail to gain sufficient community support. Without adequate breadth, it may also have limited understanding of community concerns and lack access to important community resources.

participation but may make for unwieldy meetings and sluggish decision-making. A very small council may appear elitist, or non-representative. It could also exclude parents and community members with a strong understanding of children's and families' needs, and as a result fail to gain sufficient community support. Without adequate breadth, it may also have limited understanding of community concerns and lack access to important community resources.

- Guidelines in California's Proposition 10 initiative require that local councils have five to nine members with three mandated slots for a member of the county board of supervisors, the county health officer, and one member responsible for management of children's services, public health services, behavioral health services, social services, or tobacco and other substance abuse prevention and treatment services. Each county then selects additional members based on the needs of their communities, including representatives from the areas of health, social services, and child care. Many counties did not have enough slots left over, once they filled their state and local requirements, to take advantage of their pre-existing local child care planning council's experience—clearly a valuable resource. An exception occurred in Alameda County, where members of the county child care planning council sit on the Proposition 10 commission and provided essential leadership in forming the commission and its planning process.

Establish a Planning Framework

Guidelines can be an important aid in structuring an effective local planning process. Providing an outline of required planning steps can help localities assemble the information and political will needed to do more than "tinker at the edges." In many states, localities are required to design their plans within a set of hoped for results and indicators established for the initiative at the state level. These parameters allow individual localities to prioritize among state goals and design their own action plans while keeping the initiative focused. (For a further discussion of results-based planning approaches see Chapter 9: *Link Planning to Accountability*.)

State planning guidelines often require that localities ground their action plan in a careful assessment of needs and resources. Local councils need clear requirements, adequate funding, a reasonable time frame, and varying degrees of guidance to develop a strong and valuable assessment tool. At a minimum, state guidelines should include:

- A list of indicators or data elements to be collected
- Suggestions about how and where local councils can collect existing and new data

- Guidance about how a community assessment can be used to inform planning.

Planning guidelines need to be provided *on time*, when they are needed. They also need to *build in time* so that requirements can be met. Even communities that have begun assessing needs in individual areas such as health, child care, and family support, and the few that have up-to-date community-wide assessments, will require time to synthesize data from all of these sources into a comprehensive early childhood strategy. Communities that have done minimal prior planning or are resource-poor are likely to require even more time and assistance. Minimal guidance combined with highly optimistic deadlines can spell trouble for all but the most well-prepared localities.

Clarify Expectations Regarding Plan Content

State-level experience suggests that local councils benefit from guidelines that address content—what their plans should include—as well as process. For a community's children to enter school healthy and ready to succeed, there must be a system of high quality and affordable services including child care, preschool and Head Start, health care, mental health care, and family support. (For a summary of the allowable uses of each state initiative's funds, see Appendix I.)

Almost every state, recognizing that these various supports are all essential to school readiness, allows local councils to fund comprehensive strategies. All states give local councils flexibility to decide how to distribute their funds across these areas. However, several state initiatives, notably Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, and North Carolina, devote the majority of funds to improving the quality and supply of early education services, including child care, Head Start, and prekindergarten, in order to increase school readiness. School readiness activities are funded for children age birth to five in most states.[7]

State guidelines vary in the extent to which they require specific interventions. More detailed guidelines have the advantage of making sure that localities fully understand what they are expected to do. Content-specific guidelines can help councils develop plans that are comprehensive in scope, aimed at clearly defined results, and consistent with the initiative's overall goals. These requirements also provide states with a basis for evaluation and feedback. Says one Smart Start veteran, "without that guidance and that accountability, hard-fought dollars could be wasted."

"There were a whole lot of communities that, when they were given broad direction to just go out and do good things for children and families, really did not know where to start. They were looking for much more guidance than what the state was in a position to provide."

—An expert in Iowa

Most local councils, especially those with little planning experience, welcome having a list of appropriate activities or strategies to help them plan how to meet their goals. While some councils need this assistance more than others, even communities with sophisticated planning capability stand to benefit from well-defined state parameters. North Carolina and Massachusetts allow a broad mix of activities, but they are also very specific about certain supports that must be included.

- North Carolina requires that a certain percentage of total funds be spent in several categories. It requires that local partnerships target at least 70 percent of their funds for early care and education. Health and family support activities can make up no more than 30 percent of the funds. At least 30 percent of the total funds must be used for child care subsidies. These broad requirements were designed to ensure a safety net for families, expand the availability of child care subsidies statewide, ensure that the funds stayed in early care and education, and require attention to improved outcomes. Child care subsidies were seen as a basic family support that helped to alleviate family stress by helping parents to work. Since its legislation does not define specific activities, North Carolina provides extensive training and coaching to the local Smart Start partnerships to help them develop their goals and strategies.

- Massachusetts' Community Partnerships for Children legislation mandates that local councils spend their funding on Head Start, child care, and prekindergarten and that these programs must be accredited or moving toward accreditation. It also requires that at least a third of the programs be full-day and full-year. The state office added guidelines requiring local councils to target hard-to-reach families as well as recommendations for addressing quality.

Several states provided minimal guidance in terms of activities to local councils. This made it difficult for many communities that needed more guidance. Based on their own experiences, experts from several state initiatives now recommend offering localities a menu of possible choices in several areas. Because this approach combines structure with flexibility it can be an effective way to meet the needs of numerous localities with very different planning capacities.

- In Iowa, according to one state participant, "there were a whole lot of communities that, when they were given broad direction to just go out and do good things for children and families, really did not know where to start. They were looking for much more guidance than what the state was in a position to provide."

- While South Carolina did not provide a list of suggested activities to its local councils, a state expert wishes that it had done so. The state only required that all strategies proposed in local plans be best practice or research-based. However, local councils needed more guidance and often asked the state office for specific recommendations on which strategies and services to include.

- California's Proposition 10 guidelines offered three strategic results as the overarching direction of Proposition 10 efforts—improved family functioning, improved child development, and improved child health. The guidelines illustrated strategies, rather than identifying a menu of eligible activities, to achieve these results. Each county was then responsible for conducting a resource assessment to determine what strategies to pursue in addressing their particular community's various needs. This approach was challenging for some counties with very diverse populations and a fledgling county commission staff.

In developing their guidelines, states also need to recognize that a too narrowly defined list of approaches can inhibit local flexibility and make it more difficult to coordinate services. They suggest that menus of fundable activities not be included in legislation, which is very difficult to change, but defined in state guidelines. Some state legislation, as in Florida, lays out precisely what local activities will be allowed. More broadly worded statutes, however, offer communities greater flexibility and allow the state to adjust its guidelines according to feedback from local councils.

- Legislation enacting Florida's Partnership for School Readiness initiative requires local partnerships to include 19 specific activities, such as child care resource and referral services, staff training, and developing uniform sliding fee scales for various programs. Local councils must also address how they will enhance the quality of services in the community.

Define Fiscal Accountability Procedures

States recognize the importance of ensuring local accountability for the expenditure of public funds. Adequate oversight entails supervising the receipt, redirection, and expenditure of funds that flow through the local council. It also includes responsibility for detailed accounting, making payments in a timely fashion, and all financial reporting. These record-keeping responsibilities can be burdensome for localities, especially those planning and implementing their initiatives through newly formed structures or lead agencies with minimal administrative capacity.

State guidelines have handled the challenge of fiscal accountability in different ways. Some states give local councils wide latitude in deciding how to provide fiscal oversight. Others require that specific existing organizations manage the initiative's finances, while others mandate that local initiatives incorporated as private not-for-profit bodies serve as their own fiscal agents. Where local councils are given a choice, many subcontract financial responsibilities.

- California's local commissions are free to incorporate themselves as 501(c)(3) entities so that they may oversee their own financial affairs or choose an outside agency to handle their funds. The Los Angeles county commission contracted with the county Board of Education to act as its fiscal agent.

- Massachusetts, recognizing that agencies such as public schools, Head Start, and larger child care programs have an established infrastructure that can accommodate an influx of new funds, requires that specified existing organizations, rather than a newly formed council, manage the initiative's finances.

- In North Carolina, guidelines mandate that each of the 81 local Smart Start partnerships act as its own fiscal agent, a decision that has required the state to spend considerable time developing each new board's fiscal capacity. While the state's intention was to create completely independent local boards, some representatives felt that drawing on existing expertise would have been more efficient. Said one, "In small counties especially, county government or school districts are huge systems that have fiscal capability and they could have acted as fiscal agents."

- South Carolina's First Steps initiative, like North Carolina's Smart Start, requires that each locality establish an entirely new governing board and manage its own financial affairs. However, South Carolina's state board is helping by developing as much of the financial and legal structure of the local councils as possible. For example, it cut down on each locality's administrative burden by filing for 501(c)(3) status for all of the counties in one single application, rather than requiring each community to submit its own. This made it easier for local councils to concentrate on planning and implementation.

- In Florida, all of the local partnerships have chosen existing entities, such as child care resource and referral agencies, school systems, banks, or community foundations, as fiscal agents. They did not want to create another infrastructure that would draw funding away from services for children.

Outside fiscal agents administer funds for community initiatives, but they do not control how the money is spent. As a result, they are not required to sit on local councils. Representatives from agencies that provide fiscal support—for example, a United Way, public school district, or Head Start agency—may also be council members and have a voice in deciding how the initiative should use its funds. Yet this decision-making authority is shared equally with other partners and is not a function of their role as fiscal agent.

In certain instances, it can be difficult for fiscal agents to understand this separation of roles. In Massachusetts, school boards were used to being both the fiscal agent and the decision-maker, and sometimes thought that they had authority over the local councils. "It took numerous meetings to get the school boards to understand that they were responsible for fiscal oversight, but that the council does the planning and makes the decisions about how funds are spent."

Effectively Communicate Guidelines

States need to frequently refer to guidelines in written and verbal communication with localities and be prepared to illustrate their application. Whenever possible, additional written guidance should be available to help local boards understand and fully implement state requirements.

Many communities, even those strongly focused on school readiness, find the concept of cross-sector decision-making boards, not to mention their construction, quite a challenge. Most welcome whatever assistance the state can offer to help them get started. User-friendly written guidance on the distinction between traditional program oversight and the work of a community collaborative, for example, is often needed to help localities better understand the initiative's unique purpose and to implement guidelines more fully. Nuts and bolts advice on strategies for building cross-sector membership or research findings on best practices related to state goals can also help localities minimize the time they will have to spend learning "from scratch." Some states, such as Massachusetts and California, have developed their own guides. States just beginning collaborative initiatives can build on these efforts or distribute other widely available how-to guides on the art and science of community collaboration.[8]

It is also important for states to effectively communicate the distinction between procedures that are required and those that are only recommended. In addition, states should be clear about whether, or to what extent, they will use local adherence to recommended procedures as a way of evaluating progress and determining suitability for future funding.

As states develop guidelines, they need to anticipate different interpretations and be clear about their intent. Known criteria can help localities better understand state requirements, increase the likelihood that the challenging task of developing a strong partnership gets off on the right foot, and avoid lost time while plans are revised.

As states develop guidelines, they need to anticipate different interpretations and be clear about their intent. Known criteria can help localities better understand state requirements, increase the likelihood that the challenging task of developing a strong partnership gets off on the right foot, and avoid lost time while plans are revised.

- In Florida, the state rejected a local plan on the grounds of cross-sector membership, even though the plan appeared to meet state standards. Guidelines stated that local councils must have up to one-third private sector representation. However, in one county, this third was composed entirely of private sector participants already serving on the same local school foundation. When it asked council members to detail what other committees they sat on, the state board determined that the similarity in interest between private sector members and the school district was too great to meet the initiative's intent to bring together a broad range of views. New appointments had to be made.

Build Broad Constituencies Across Sectors

Councils need a broad membership and a balance of power among members. Well-designed state guidelines help set the stage for success. However, strong leadership and collaborative local strategies are essential to involve parents, community, and business representatives; minimize the potential for conflict of interest on local councils; and expand public involvement and support for the council's planning agenda in the larger community.

To successfully plan and implement a comprehensive early childhood initiative, a local council will need the support of a broad-based constituency, both internally, within its membership, and externally, from the larger community. Targeted outreach is an essential step in developing both membership and continued political support for the council's work.

Internally, cross-sector membership provides councils with a valuable range of resources, knowledge, and experience. Typically, local leaders attempt to include on the councils a mix of professional stakeholders with the power and position to access funding streams and sway policymakers; families, service providers, clients, and neighborhood residents who will be affected most by council decisions and provide its most acute sounding board; and influential civic and business leaders with a vested interest in healthy neighborhoods and families.

As demonstrated in their legislation and guidelines, states clearly recognize the importance of cross-sector membership on local councils. Most states encourage diverse participation and set parameters (with varying degrees of

Diversity of membership is essential to a local council's success. Broad-based representation enables members to bring a wealth of different perspectives and areas of expertise to the community table and together develop a comprehensive system that meets the needs of young children and their families.

flexibility) on the number and kind of representation. Experience suggests that well-designed strategies are needed to ensure a reasonable balance of power among members within councils.

Externally, councils need to reach beyond their membership and the organizations they represent into the surrounding community. Public engagement efforts to educate, inform, and especially to gather input are essential. By casting a wide communications net, councils can greatly increase the number of people who understand the value of high quality early childhood services and education. Political support grows when taxpayers and key constituencies appreciate the challenges involved and the resources needed to improve children's lives. It is strengthened when members of the community feel that their concerns are listened to and their contributions are valued.

Foster Collaboration and Strong Leadership

Collaborative early childhood strategies require participants to "come together under an umbrella and help the entire community embrace and act upon the needs of children" and their families.[9] Collaboration demands that members of local councils work together to establish common goals and agree to use their personal and institutional power to achieve them. Because this often requires making substantial changes in the services their organizations provide or in the rules and regulations that govern their own institutions, members of the local councils must "have the authority to speak for the institutions or the segments of the community they represent. They agree to commit resources and alter existing policies and procedures to attain measurable goals and objectives. They accept individual and collective responsibility for outcomes. Though highly challenging, collaborative decision-making offers a vehicle for restructuring the current patchwork of early childhood education and supports that exist in most communities into a comprehensive system of services for young children and their families."[10]

To collaborate successfully, local councils must develop strong leaders to inspire creativity, promote flexibility, and negotiate compromise. Effective leadership makes sure that everyone's voice is heard and allows time for members to get to know and trust one another. Strong leaders help members of local councils set goals collaboratively, recognize and respect each member's expertise, and foster a sense of collective ownership. They allow all council members to make decisions, rather than act merely as advisors.[11]

Effective leaders of local councils have strong community ties, good management ability, and a facility for enabling the collaboration process to run smoothly. They must also be strong communicators, possess a high degree of authority, and have a clear vision for the initiative in their community.

Ensure Cross-Sector Membership on Local Councils

Diversity of membership is essential to a local council's success. Broad-based representation enables members to bring a wealth of different perspectives and areas of expertise to the community table and together develop a comprehensive system that meets the needs of young children and their families.

As discussed in Chapter 5: *Establish Clear Guidelines for Local Councils*, every state highlighted in this guide mandates at least some portion of local membership, either through state legislation or guidelines. These guidelines assert the importance of cross-sector membership and provide a useful starting point for localities as they begin to bring together a representative group.

The recommended number of participants ranges from a low of five to nine in California to as many as 32 in South Carolina; there is no upper limit in several other states. Those who are commonly encouraged or required to participate on local councils include: the heads of local school boards, county boards, mental health agencies, and health agencies, as well as representatives of state prekindergarten initiatives, Head Start, child care resource and referral agencies, businesses, the religious community, nonprofit service providers, and for-profit service providers. Parents and other community members who are concerned about children are also included.

Membership should be both broad and purposeful. Because local councils are responsible for developing plans that address child care, family support, parent education, health, and other needs, it is helpful if representatives from these fields serve as members of local councils. The active participation of officials from each of the various sectors listed above helps to ensure that members of the local councils understand current community needs and the importance of new resources for early childhood. Cross-cutting membership helps build connections among needs, resources, and expertise. Table 1 provides a summary of state requirements for local council membership. (For a further discussion of the planning process and community participation, see Chapter 9: *Link Planning to Accountability*.)

Table 1. State Requirements for Local Council Membership

STATE	NUMBER OF REQUIRED MEMBERS	MEMBERSHIP
California	A range of five to nine members	Must include the county health officer; one member of the Board of Supervisors; and one member responsible for management of county children's services, public health services, behavioral health services, social services, or tobacco and other substance abuse prevention and treatment services. The remaining two to six members shall be from among the following categories: recipients of services provided under the county's plan; early childhood educators; representatives of local child care resource and referral agencies or child care coordinating groups; representatives from prevention or early intervention programs for families at risk, local school districts, or local medical, pediatric, or obstetric associations and societies.
Colorado	A minimum of six members	Must include representatives from the county Board of Commissioners, local school district boards, the county Department of Social Services, the local Head Start grantee, a private for-profit licensed child care provider, and a private nonprofit licensed child care provider.
Florida	At least 18 and not more than 25 members	Must include the Department of Child and Family Services district administrator; a district superintendent of schools; a regional Workforce Development Board chair or director; a county Health Department director or designee; a Children's Services Council or Juvenile Welfare Board chair or executive director; a child care licensing agency head; one member appointed by the county Board of Commissioners; one member appointed by the Department of Children and Family Services district administrator; one member appointed by a school board; a central child care agency administrator; a Head Start director; a private child care provider; and a faith-based child care provider. More than one-third of the members must be from the private sector and neither they nor their families may earn income from early education or child care.
Iowa	Not set in law	Must include representatives from county departments of Human Services, Health, and Education, and from business and religious communities. A majority must be citizens or elected officials.
Kansas	At least 12 members from 17 groups identified in law	Must include representation from the following 17 groups: mental health centers, private child care providers, cooperative extension offices, Head Start, social and rehabilitation services, schools, health departments, the religious community, business, families, community colleges or universities, libraries, government agencies, child care resource and referral agencies, interagency coordinating councils, other nonprofit organizations, and foundations.
Kentucky	No fewer than seven and no more than 27 members	May include, but is not limited to, one representative from each of the following categories: early childhood advocates; religious community; school districts; family resource centers; military establishment; Head Start or Early Head Start; for-profit, nonprofit center-based, or family child care programs; child care resource and referral agencies or child care subsidy agents; child care consumers or parents; county cooperative extension services; public health organizations; universities, colleges, or technical schools; early intervention; agencies administering services to children with disabilities; home visitation agencies; family literacy agencies; civic organizations; public libraries; regional training centers; community action agencies; government; business; home schooling associations; health care professionals; foster care parents; or adoptive parents.

Table 1. State Requirements for Local Council Membership (continued)

STATE	NUMBER OF REQUIRED MEMBERS	MEMBERSHIP
Massachusetts	17 required members	Must include a public school principal; three early care and education providers; three parents of young children; a representative of the local child care resource and referral agency; a representative of the local Head Start agency; a representative of private providers of child care in the community (from a preschool, faith-based child care, family child care, or for-profit or nonprofit child care center); two representatives of family child care providers; a representative of the Early Intervention program; a representative of the Massachusetts Family Network program; a representative of the Parent-Child Home program; and two representatives from among the following four categories: business, medical professions, religious organizations, and senior citizens.
North Carolina	At least 21 members	Must include a county commissioner; the county manager; a representative from municipal government; the directors of the local departments of Social Services, Health, and Mental Health; the superintendent of public schools; the community college president; the director of the local cooperative extension agency; two business leaders; two parents with preschool children receiving child care subsidies; a religious leader; a Head Start representative; one center-based child care provider; one family child care provider; and representatives from the child care resource and referral agency or other nonprofit agency related to child care, the local library, a local foundation, and the local interagency coordinating council or a parent of a child with a disability.
South Carolina	As many as 32 members depending on the number of school districts in a county	Must include not more than two from the following categories: prekindergarten through primary educator; family education, training, and support provider; child care and early childhood education provider; health care provider; transportation provider; and a representative of a nonprofit organization providing services to young children and families. Other members include a representative of the religious community; a representative of the business community; three parents of preschool children; four members from early childhood education; and one representative from each of the following: county Department of Social Services, county Department of Health and Environmental Control, Head Start, the county library, and each school district in the county. If necessary to assure all areas and populations of the county are adequately represented, four more members may be appointed by the legislative delegation.

Establish a Balance of Power

States know that it makes good sense for communities to draw on local agencies and existing professional relationships as they develop their councils. Most states encourage this strategy through formal guidelines and/or technical assistance. However, a real effort must be made to make sure that parents, community representatives, and business people participate actively and share power equitably. Public agencies bring important financial resources to the table but the insight and experience of community representatives are essential if leaders and participants in initiatives are to think and act "outside of the box."

Virtually every state requires local councils to develop broad representation. Even with these requirements, however, it is not always easy to ensure that the local council will provide an opportunity for all voices to be heard, rather than simply reinforcing existing power relationships among established interests.

Requirements to include parents and community residents move in the right direction but they may not fully communicate the importance of representational diversity. Guidelines and related initial training materials should be written to help localities implement the spirit, not just the letter, of the state's requirement. For example, seats reserved for parents should be filled by individuals who speak primarily as, and for, parents who use services, rather than by representatives of other sectors and interests who may also happen to have children. Especially on small councils, this kind of misallocation can seriously reduce the chance for real innovation and grassroots support.

Guidelines should also be reviewed by state offices to ensure that mandated membership requirements do not create voting blocs that have the unintended effect of drowning out individual voices. States can inadvertently give some sectors a marked advantage over others. This is most likely to happen when several members have the same leadership or operational style and can draw on well-established relationships that others do not share.

- In Florida, eight of the 18 mandated slots on the local councils are to be filled by people employed by, or elected to, positions in county government or appointed by the heads of local agencies. Despite organizational differences, these representatives are often used to operating in a political environment with one another and can easily coalesce as a group when shared interest requires. Together, they constitute a powerful voice that can make it difficult for others to be heard.

Create a Climate for Participation

There will always be tension between highly influential stakeholders who have traditionally been in positions of power and community grassroots representatives who are moving into new positions of leadership in local initiatives. Some steps can help equalize the distribution of power across both groups. To ensure broad participation, it is essential that each participant have a clear role and know why they are on the local council, understand what is going on, and feel comfortable expressing themselves when they have concerns.

In general, local councils can make involvement easier for all members, particularly parents and employers, when they:

- Set clear expectations, tasks, and responsibilities
- Keep meetings efficient and on schedule
- Create an environment in which members' input is respected and encouraged, and in which members feel free to voice their opinions or concerns without fear of negative repercussions
- Make assignments that are meaningful and take advantage of the members' areas of expertise
- Recognize and value different levels of participation
- Provide members with the background information they need to make decisions
- Give partners credit and recognition for their accomplishments.

Identify and Encourage Parent Leadership

Parent ownership and active decision-making in local councils are essential to planning improvements that will make a difference. Localities should understand, however, that for some low-income parents currently using services, participation carries a significant perception of risk. They may need a good deal of support and encouragement to speak openly. Their concern is far from unreasonable given the power that some agencies have over individual families through child welfare decisions and income subsidies. In one local partnership, a parent sitting next to the director of the county Department of Social Services (DSS) wanted to voice her opinion, but was just too afraid. "This was the man that I saw as the cause of all my problems and frustrations," she explained. "When I went to the DSS agency, he had the power to take my kids from my home and to withhold the child care stipend I depended on."[12]

"It is wise to train members of the councils about collaboration and arm the weaker members with skills so they can stand up to big players or stakeholders who are used to getting their way."

—An expert in North Carolina

Localities should take the time to identify parents with strong leadership skills who are already involved in early childhood issues to serve as council members. They should scout out Head Start parent organizations, housing councils, and school and neighborhood groups, as well as playgrounds and health centers to learn who the formal and informal members of targeted communities are.

It is also important to give parents specific authority in the decision-making process. Creating co-chaired leadership in which a parent and an organizational or business representative lead together is one approach. Establishing a working group focused on building parent leadership and involvement is another.

- In North Carolina, parents are recognized and valued as consumers. Because parents use services, they offer a valuable perspective in evaluating Smart Start projects. Local councils survey parents to elicit their views on all of the services that the partnerships provide, such as child care assistance programs, referral services, and home visiting. Councils then act on the basis of the parents' collective recommendations. However, it is important to note that such efforts to solicit the views of parents who do not sit on the council should supplement, rather than serve as a substitute for, formal parent representation.

  Ongoing training is important. "It is wise," says an expert from North Carolina, "to train members of the councils about collaboration and arm the weaker members with skills so they can stand up to big players or stakeholders who are used to getting their way." Parent representatives are motivated and committed to promoting the well-being of their children. Honing their advocacy and leadership skills can help them speak more effectively for the children and parents they represent.

  Support strategies also play an important part in promoting parent participation. Engaging in an extracurricular activity, such as a local council, takes time and money—especially for individuals who are not participating as part of their paid employment. Local councils have helped in various ways. Some have paid for lost work time or provided translation or language support for parents with limited English proficiency. Others have held dinner meetings and provided child care and transportation to make it possible for parents and others who work during the day to attend.

- In Lawrence, Massachusetts the local partnership encourages parent participation in decision-making by holding some partnership meetings by phone. This decreases the amount of time parents must be away from work or their children.

Seek Out Business Participation

Members of the business community can bring enormous value to local councils. Their participation can signal the broad-based acceptability of an initiative and help recruit and sustain interest throughout the private sector. Organizations are often more willing to financially assist and otherwise support an effort led by a respected corporate colleague. Business expertise in strategic planning, finance, public relations, and other related areas can lead to more focused and efficient planning and implementation. Business participation also helps to reinforce the link between school readiness and an educated workforce that is necessary to sustain the economic viability of the community.

Even though early childhood initiatives have a great deal to gain from corporate involvement, employers, like parents, are often underrepresented on local councils. State experience suggests that the best way to turn this situation around is for local councils to better understand the perspective and constraints of the business community and make clear exactly why and how employers can help.

The type of business participation possible on a local council varies according to the size and character of its corporate community. Rural areas with mostly small businesses, such as convenience stores and gas stations, are quite different from industrialized or high tech areas and face different participation challenges. Eighty percent of businesses in Colorado, for example, employ no more than 50 people. Small business owners are hard-pressed to take time out from their paid work to sit on a planning council. In these cases, participation may initially best come through in-kind contributions including printing brochures or displaying information materials. If these relationships are tended over time, participation is likely to grow.

Understand Business Needs

Businesses have a vested interest in building the economic infrastructure of their communities and minimizing the work-life issues faced by their employees. While corporate support for early childhood services remains far less than is needed, many businesses understand that quality child care and early education improve the productivity of their employees and help to build a better workforce down the road. The challenge is to increase the participation of those who already "get it" and help many others see what is in it for them.

Show Business-Like Efficiency

Efficiency is important to every council member regardless of what sector of the community they represent. When employers agree to participate, they expect meetings to be purposeful and well-run. They assume they will see the same emphasis on productivity and accomplishment as they would in their own organizations. Employers are often used to making top-down decisions that are quickly implemented throughout their institutions and expect their staff to identify problems and remove barriers to progress. They may find collaborative work with its emphasis on building trust and a shared vision, rather than quickly producing a tangible product, frustrating and unrewarding.

Councils need to make sure that potential business representatives understand the importance of constructing a strong foundation on which to base future action. Yet, they also need to tighten up their own procedures. Investing time and effort up front to develop organizational efficiency can have a sizeable payoff. Business partners will be more likely to tolerate other "soft" activities designed to foster trust and communication, essential elements that will keep the initiative productive over the long haul.

Make Clear How They Can Help

Business community partners can play many roles in early childhood initiatives. They are often asked to provide financial support. In some North Carolina counties, for example, local businesses have been instrumental in providing matching dollars.

However, direct financial support is not the only or even most important contribution employers can make. Business leaders can build allies in venues far beyond the traditional early childhood community. State and local boards often include a prominent member of the business community who can champion the initiative in the press, with the legislature, at Rotary and Kiwanis meetings, in advertising to customers and vendors, and in casual conversations with clients and business associates. They can also strengthen the work of the council by sharing financial, technical, and public relations know-how. Councils, however, have to let partners know that their help is wanted and together think about what is needed.

- In Florida, local councils chaired by a member of the business community successfully recruited and sustained the interest of other local business representatives. According to state officials who reviewed local plans, business involvement led to better planning with more of a focus on results for children and families.

- In Kansas, the executive vice president of Cessna Aircraft is the chair of the Children's Cabinet, which is responsible for Smart Start Kansas. He is a strong proponent of the importance of early childhood and business participation in planning comprehensive supports.

- To take advantage of the business community's interest and enlist their participation on local councils, Massachusetts has developed tips for including business members in their community partnerships, even though members of the business community are not specifically required to sit on the local councils. Massachusetts offers the following advice for local councils seeking broader business representation:
  - Recruit businesses that most clearly benefit from high quality early care and education or whose employees benefit greatly. For example, real estate agents are concerned about attracting families with young children to their community. An exemplary early care and education system in the community may be a significant draw for young families.
  - Provide business representatives with meaningful and concrete ways to be involved in the council and in Community Partnerships for Children (CPC) programs. People who run a successful business might advise the council on a variety of issues, such as marketing strategies, software purchases, developing an accounting system, or how to prepare for an audit.
  - Work with business representatives to develop a plan to improve business involvement in CPC, either through council membership or other activities. One CPC program developed a video with business assistance to inform other businesses of the benefits of high quality early care and education.

Address Conflict of Interest Concerns

States differ significantly on the question of whether persons affiliated with any agency or program that receives or could receive funding from the initiative, can be members of state and local councils. Conflict of interest, real or perceived, can have a profound effect on participation and decision-making in local councils. While it is important that the potential for conflict of interest be minimized, it is equally important that resulting policies do not exclude those with the best knowledge of young children, their families, and the issues they face.

- Veterans of North Carolina's Smart Start initiative disagree with the need to automatically exclude providers, whether public or private, from state or local boards. "If you eliminate everybody in the community who might at some point get money, in the process you eliminate the people who know

the most about what young children need and how to get there." Instead of restricting membership, the state and local partnerships have conflict of interest policies in place and members must acknowledge conflicts and recuse themselves from voting when appropriate.

Allow Localities Leeway in Managing Conflict of Interest

When states do not set hard and fast rules about conflict of interest, localities are free to decide when and how to intervene. Flexibility to manage potential conflict of interest through policies and procedures developed at the local level is especially helpful in rural or underserved areas where the pool of potential members is relatively small. It also recognizes the greater ability that localities often have to read and monitor their own circumstances and activities. However, some guidance is helpful to local communities with what can be a very sensitive issue.

- Several North Carolina counties established working groups to review funding proposals and make recommendations for funding to the local partnerships. Members representing agencies under consideration for Smart Start funds were not allowed to review any proposal from, or vote on funding for, an agency or a program in which they had a direct stake. In Orange County, members affiliated with agencies or organizations that might benefit simply recuse themselves by leaving the room. In Forsyth and Durham counties, members sign agreements that they will remove themselves from votes in which a direct or perceived conflict exists, declare their affiliations when reviewing proposals or discussing funding, and act in the best interest of the entire community, not just their agency.

- Massachusetts recommends that its local councils reduce the possibility of conflict of interest by using the following methods:
  - Balancing the voting members between those who receive funds with other community representatives who do not receive funds
  - Including parents who represent families from a variety of programs
  - Allocating an equal number of votes to the Head Start, public school, and child care sectors
  - Requiring that members with a conflict of interest in a pending vote declare their interest and have it recorded in the minutes
  - Ensuring that when local CPCs have a competitive process for some service (such as capital projects or quality mini-grants), the agencies or individuals applying for funds may not participate in the review process, even though they are on the council.

- South Carolina requires training on minimizing conflict of interest once a year for members of the county partnership boards. The state office provides the training and has developed written policy for county boards on this issue.

Build Broad Public Support

The creation of a broad constituency begins internally with cross-cutting state and local council membership. It is strengthened by steps to tap perspectives and resources beyond the council, by making special efforts to involve the hard-to-reach, and by building a sense of community commitment to the goals of the initiative.

Solicit Input from All Segments of the Community

One of the greatest strengths of local initiatives for children and families comes from the opportunity the initiatives offer to localities to identify and act on community needs. Making the most of this opportunity depends on local councils' willingness to solicit and listen to community input. In turn, reaching out helps to build ownership and support for their planning efforts. Input should be solicited at every stage throughout planning, implementation, and evaluation. A formal needs and resource assessment is a required part of the planning process in most state initiatives. Some states tie funding to assurances that serious effort is made to obtain wide input. (For further discussion of needs and resource assessment as part of the planning process, see Chapter 9: *Link Planning to Accountability*.)

- In South Carolina, legislation requires county partnership boards to show proof of collaboration, and the boards must involve diverse and hard-to-reach populations in their resource assessments and planning—before they can receive state funding. This has encouraged local councils to seek out parents and other community representatives in their neighborhoods, child care centers, and places of worship.

- In California, each local commission is required to have at least one formal advisory committee, task forces, and public input at regular meetings.

Reaching out to ensure that all sectors of the community are heard from is a challenging task. Councils need the time and resources to plan and publicize effective strategies. In addition to finding the time for council meetings, they need to identify ways to reach the larger community that will make people want to attend, make their attendance possible, and make them feel that the effort has been worthwhile.

"The public understands that the commission is receptive to their thoughts about the plans, and changes have been made in response to concerns voiced by the public."

— An advocate in Los Angeles, California

Barriers to obtaining broad-based public input include packed family schedules, inadequate public transportation, varied language and cultural interests, and skepticism about results. These issues, particularly lack of public transportation, are often magnified in sparsely populated rural areas where gathering public input can be especially challenging. In all cases, meetings require skilled facilitation to make sure that common themes are heard and that diverse cultural perspectives and concerns are recognized. Feedback is essential. Participants need to know their ideas and opinions are important, how they will be used, and when they can expect some kind of follow-up.

- When the Los Angeles Proposition 10 local commission decided to hold public forums as part of their community assessment process, they knew it would not be easy. At first, language was a barrier. But the commission got people to the table by hiring 11 staff, all bilingual, to reach out to diverse communities. Then they quickly earned community support by incorporating comments and suggestions that arose from the forums into the local plan. According to an advocate, "the public understands that the commission is receptive to their thoughts about the plans, and changes have been made in response to concerns voiced by the public." These changes have included focusing on low-income children and children with special needs; providing multilingual services such as a "warmline" for parents who need assistance finding children's services; and investing $12 million to improve systems coordination and make services easier for parents to access.

- In California's Alameda County, the local commission held 45 meetings over a six-month period, in every single neighborhood and in four languages. The meetings produced a high level of involvement from child care practitioners and parents. Members of the commission found that evening meetings and translation services were essential, and food and child care were provided to make it easier for parents to attend, recognizing families' needs at the end of a busy day. Even though at first no one knew what "the Commission" was, people were willing to come to an event hosted by the mayor or a member of the County Board of Supervisors. The commission also used a telephone survey of 400 parents and focus groups to gain input.

Target the Hard-to-Reach

Even when meetings are well-planned and publicized, not every segment of the community will be fully represented. Because many people do not learn about planning meetings in time to attend or find it difficult to get to them, local councils have had to develop other ways to gather input from residents whose voices they

might otherwise not hear. A variety of targeted strategies, including focus groups, surveys, phone calls, and door-to-door canvassing, have all been used successfully.

Often multiple methods are necessary since what is effective in gathering input from one segment of the community may not work for another. It is important, however, that councils are sensitive about how they use certain targeted approaches, especially house visits and phone calls. These may appear to some families as an invasion of privacy unless attention has been paid to these concerns in pre-visit training and thoughtfully prepared introductions.

- In North Carolina, some local partnerships wanted to know what parents who were not currently using services had to say about early childhood issues. The state office provided funds to train parents to go door-to-door in various neighborhoods to talk with these families. The visits helped ascertain what the families' needs and issues were and how they could be built into the local plan. In addition to this approach, local councils sought out parents' input at child care centers and by hosting special local events such as fairs and award ceremonies designed to build public awareness about the initiative.

- The Greater Lawrence Partnership for Children in Massachusetts uses phone calls and surveys to solicit parent input.

- The Lakes Area Community Empowerment council in Iowa conducted more than 95 community planning meetings to gather initial input. They decided to build on the information they gathered by developing a follow-up survey. Using this second technique they reached an additional 350 community members and significantly deepened their understanding of community issues.

- The Calhoun, Pocahontas, and Webster County Community Empowerment council in Iowa represents a tri-county area. To ensure that each county's needs are represented, the council holds local monthly meetings in each of the three counties where parents and other community members offer input. This takes more time than rotating meetings (convening the council once every three months in each county). However, the continuous opportunity for input keeps the initiative front and center in each jurisdiction and helps community residents see the importance of their participation.

- In Florida, thousands of community members attended a series of meetings on the local plan in urban Miami-Dade County. Attendance at meetings held in rural counties was far less. Local councils posted public notices, but few people attended. As one state participant observed: "Posting a notice of a meeting is not the same as public input."

Invest Adequate Resources and Develop Flexible Spending Policies

In addition to committing new dollars, states must consider how to allocate funds among communities and whether to use targeted, universal, or competitive funding mechanisms. They need to examine the benefits of matching requirements that may encourage some areas to better tap local resources but need to be designed flexibly to address community variation. Flexible spending policies to permit one-time expenditures, budget rollovers, and reallocation of unspent funds among local councils may also help localities make the best use of state dollars. Well-designed funding policies help communities leverage additional resources as well.

Investments in local councils have the potential to pay off in high quality, accessible, and affordable services and improved outcomes for children and families. However, in order to design, construct, and adequately grow a responsive system of comprehensive early childhood supports, local councils will need continuous funding well beyond the initial planning and start-up phase. Localities will require substantial new dollars as well as better coordination of existing funding streams in order to make a measurable change in children's lives. A predictable source of funding sufficient to staff and administer the local council's work and to adequately finance an improved system is essential. This is important not only to enhance and expand early childhood supports but also to create an atmosphere of trust and collaboration among council members and partners in the community as they set out on their task.

With the promise of new resources, local councils not only gain the capacity to make greater progress for children and families, but may be more willing to re-examine inefficiencies within the existing system.

Localities need the following:

- Significant new funding
- Realistic matching requirements
- State policies that allow local councils to fully use state funding including flexible time frames in which to plan and expend funds
- Ability to leverage additional resources.

Commit New Dollars

The majority of states in this report invest new dollars in their initiatives. But their budgets varied widely in 2001, from $1.6 million in Kentucky to $650 million in California, and used a variety of funding sources. California, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and South Carolina have the largest budgets. However, no state is near to fully funding a high quality, universal early childhood system. In some cases, the absence of new funding has proven a significant barrier to effective operation.

- Relative to its population, North Carolina has made the greatest financial commitment to early childhood: $260 million of state general revenue and $55.2 million of private contributions supported Smart Start in FY 2001. This amount was greater than the state funding provided for initiatives in Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and South Carolina *combined*. North Carolina's local partnerships have used these funds to strengthen the quality of child care, provide health care to more children, and pay for family support programs, including scholarships for child care, parent education, and adult literacy programs.

- California's Proposition 10 initiative has the largest amount of funding, with $650 million derived in state fiscal year 2001 from a tobacco sales tax adopted through a state ballot initiative. Eighty percent was distributed to local commissions. The remaining 20 percent was retained by the state commission for public education, training, technical assistance, and identification of best practices.

- Massachusetts, with $104 million, has the third largest budget. In FY 2001, $56.8 million of this total came from state general revenue. However, the state has increased its reliance on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds. In FY 2001, the state invested $47.2 million of TANF funds in the initiative. These funds substituted for state general revenue funds, which had served as the sole support for CPC.

- South Carolina's First Steps allocation is growing. Funding increased from $20 million in FY 2000 to $30 million in FY 2001. However, this increase was $6 million less than had been anticipated, as counties moved from planning to implementation more slowly than expected.

Initiatives in Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, and Kentucky are operating with far less state investment. Smart Start Kansas supports seven pilot projects with $2.75 million of tobacco settlement funds. In Kentucky, $3 million of its tobacco settlement funds will be allocated to community councils over two years (an additional $26 million will directly fund new state family support, education, and health programs for children from birth to five and their families). In spring 2001, Colorado authorized a $1.5 million allocation of Child Care and Development Block Grant funds to support local councils. In Florida, localities rely almost exclusively on existing funding streams. The lack of new funding has hindered both planning and implementation.

A number of states rely on a sizeable amount of federal TANF funding. Since these funds could be needed for cash assistance to low-income families as a result of an economic downturn, local councils could be forced to curb their activities.

Without additional state funds, most local councils are likely to face a very unproductive planning process. Early childhood development is already notoriously underfunded. Local council members come to the table concerned about how to support their own resource-poor programs and many believe that under the guise of efficiency they may be cut even further. With the promise of new resources, local councils not only gain the capacity to make greater progress for children and families, but may be more willing to re-examine inefficiencies within the existing system.

- Florida's initiative was driven by a vision to improve children's readiness to learn when they enter school by increasing the efficiency of existing funding without a significant infusion of new dollars. The intention was to reconfigure the current components of the child care and early education system through a local planning process in which funding and administrative decisions would be made at the community level. Waivers from existing state rules were made available to local communities to improve efficiency. In addition, communities were expected to raise a small amount of funds from new co-payments imposed on parents using prekindergarten programs. However, this approach did not result in substantial new resources for local councils and frustrated many members who devoted several months to a planning process and found themselves without new funds to implement their ambitious plans to support children and families.

- Colorado gave its consolidated child care pilots authority to use a waiver process to assist in the development of a comprehensive child care system. As in Florida, the waivers allowed for a flexible use of funds but did not provide an adequate infusion of new dollars to the local pilots. A lack of resources to address compelling community needs was identified by the pilots as their greatest barrier to success. The solution to give Colorado's pilots priority when applying for certain competitive state grants may work for them but may also penalize other needy communities.

Decide How to Allocate Funds Among Communities

In order to receive funds, local councils in every state must submit a plan. The amount received is typically determined on the basis of a state funding formula. The formula is usually but not always based on need. Sometimes awards are determined exclusively on a competitive evaluation of each grant proposal. The amount that a community receives is based on what the locality proposes to do and the state's assessment of its plan's relative merits as compared to other applicants. As experience in California proves, it is possible to alter funding strategies mid-stream but, as shown in Iowa, it is not always easy.

Consider the Impact of Targeted, Universal, or Competitive Allocation

As much as possible, states need to consider the impact of various distribution methods before one is chosen. A targeted approach in which states allocate funds according to a needs-based funding formula is most likely to ensure that the lowest income areas with fewest resources receive assistance first. A universal approach, like the one California uses, recognizes that every jurisdiction needs to improve its early childhood system. A competitive grant allocation method favors communities with strong grant writing capability and resources. This approach may increase existing disparity among localities by distributing funds to already strong areas.

- California, in contrast to most state initiatives, does not use a need-based funding formula. Its original allocation formula, established by language in the Proposition 10 ballot initiative, was based entirely on the number of live births in each county. However, once the proposition passed, the state realized that some counties, often rural areas, with very low birth rates had very high needs. Under the formula, they would receive relatively little assistance. The state anticipated that small counties with few resources might not choose to participate in a rigorous planning process when immediate needs were so pressing. To encourage even small counties to

submit a strategic plan for Proposition 10 funds, the state instituted a base allocation of $200,000 to cover administration and program implementation. An additional planning stipend of $50,000 was given to every county by the state commission to assist with strategic planning. With these changes, several rural counties with low-income children and families with significant needs decided to participate in the initiative.

- Iowa uses two sources of funds—Early Childhood funding comprised of TANF dollars and School Ready funding derived from general state revenue—to support its initiative. Early Childhood funding is allocated through a formula based on the community's percentage of the state's average monthly statewide Family Investment Program (FIP, the state's welfare-to-work program) cases in the preceding fiscal year. A competitive grant process allocated School Ready dollars with awards based on the projected cost of the programs and services communities said they needed and would implement. This method led to a wide disparity in the distribution of School Ready funds across the state.

  In FY 2000, the state proposed a change to increase funding equity, but political considerations made it impossible to implement mid-stream. The plan called for School Ready funds to be based on the community's relative proportion of the state's general population and population of children qualifying for free or reduced-price school lunches, plus a base amount for each community. The legislature rejected the proposal. Too many current Community Empowerment designees would have lost funds because the state had not incorporated adequate new dollars in its proposal to ensure maintenance of effort in these communities. The revised formula was approved for new community empowerment councils, but the old formula remained in effect for existing grantees so that their funding remained stable.

Focus Dollars on Communities in Need

Most states use a funding formula to determine the amount of funding available to each locality. The factors on which the formula is based vary from state to state. Except in California, state allocation formulas are designed to provide funds to local communities according not only to the size of the population, but also to the proportion of low-income families. Some states, such as Colorado and Kentucky, fund only targeted communities; in others, such as Massachusetts and North Carolina, funding has been made available to all communities for all children, but formula allocations are weighted to benefit low-income areas. Where grants are tied to the number of children rather than the economic standing of specific jurisdictions, some states have devised a minimum allocation to make sure that sparsely populated areas benefit.

There is general consensus among the states that economically depressed communities warrant more dollars because they have both greater needs and fewer resources with which to meet them. State dollars are the only way for them to fill the gaps and improve the quality of services. As one North Carolina expert put it, "Some counties are so impoverished that you couldn't find good (child) care anywhere ...the market rate is so low that it cannot support high quality care."

- North Carolina bases its Smart Start allocations on the total cost to each particular county of serving children who are estimated to need subsidized early care and education. The funding formula considers: the total number of children under five years of age; the number of children eligible for child care subsidies; the cost of high quality child care and education; and the amount of other available early childhood funds. Because the formula takes into account the communities' resources and needs, economically depressed communities receive proportionately greater allocations.

- South Carolina's formula weighs a variety of factors, including the population of a county's children age birth to five. It also considers the percentage of children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, as well as the percentage of third graders performing below basic level on reading and math. By including academic measures, the state emphasizes the initiative's linkage to school readiness.

- Massachusetts' Community Partnerships for Children program targets dollars for low-income children from working families. In determining its awards, the Department of Education considers two statistics: the percentage of low-income working families in the city or town and the total number of three- and four-year-old children in the community based on birth records. The total number of three- and four-year-olds is multiplied by the percentage of low-income working families to estimate the number of children from low-income working families. Once this is determined, the state takes an additional step and divides this number of children into the total allocation for the year to determine a fixed cost per low-income child. As a result, the same amount is appropriated for a low-income child, no matter where he or she lives. A single exception is a $15,000 "floor" or minimum allocation. Designed by the Department of Education's Office of Early Learning Services, this policy ensures sufficient funding for small communities so that it is worth their effort to apply.

- In California, although the funding formula for counties is based on the number of live births, the state commission has chosen to allocate up to $200 million of its funding over four years to a quality improvement effort using a formula that identifies the communities with the lowest performing schools. This strongly correlates to highly impoverished areas, both urban and rural.

Develop Realistic Matching Requirements

Matching strategies can potentially contribute to a local council's ongoing support by creating new local revenue sources. Only three states—Kansas, North Carolina, and South Carolina—require a local match for state funds. Advocates for matching requirements cite several advantages. First, a local match generates additional financial support. Requiring a local match "forces people at the community level to put money on the table that you might not get without it" says a North Carolina participant. Second, meeting a match requirement can raise community awareness about children and families and cultivate contributions from new sources. Third, a match can help convince legislators who need proof of community ownership that the initiative has merit. When states choose to pilot local planning initiatives, they often select communities that have resources to plan and implement services, and that can meet the matching requirements established by the state.

- In Kansas, local communities are required to provide a 20 percent match—10 percent cash and 10 percent in-kind, which includes facilities, equipment, volunteer expenses, salaries, phones, and electricity supported by local entities. The 10 percent cash match was limited to local funds, not state or federal dollars or any local dollars previously committed. The match requirement was established to demonstrate the commitment of the community partnership, the participating organizations, and the community at large.

- North Carolina's 15 percent match consists of a 10 percent match in cash and five percent match in in-kind contributions. For almost seven years, the state Smart Start partnership raised the cash portion of the match, and the local partnerships raised the in-kind portion. However, in 1999 the state partnership board passed the cash requirement on to the local communities, to encourage the investment of private funds in the local partnerships. This has been a challenge for sparsely populated, rural communities that have no industries or foundations to provide matching funds. One strategy that helps these communities is the local partnerships' ability to use parents' co-payments for child care assistance to meet the state match.

Once they receive funding, local councils are caught between practical and political demands. Localities need sufficient time to establish their goals and strategies and develop their plans, but at the same time, they must spend funds to establish services to children and families quickly enough to maintain political support for their efforts.

Consider the Variation in Local Capacity

There are, however, downsides of a matching strategy. Communities that are most in need may have the greatest difficulty in meeting a cash match. Allowing in-kind contributions to meet the local match can help in these cases. However, tracking and placing a monetary value on in-kind gifts can be challenging for local councils, even in communities with sophisticated fiscal management. In addition, stringent match requirements may pit advocates of separate programs who are seeking funds from their local community against each other, creating opponents instead of allies.

- South Carolina requires a 15 percent local match in its legislation. The state board may waive the requirement for counties if they are unable to meet the match, but has not yet had to do so.

Establish Flexible Spending Policies

Even in the states with the greatest investments, local councils receive only a fraction of what they need to build and maintain an adequate early childhood system of supports and services. However, several states report that local councils frequently find it difficult to spend their full allocation in the required time frame, especially in the first year or two of the initiative. This is because comprehensive planning, not to mention implementation, is a complex, multi-layered process.

States need to develop mechanisms that allow promising initiatives enough time to make the best use of state dollars and local efforts. Phasing in state initiatives allows states and localities the room to learn from prior experience. If states can provide a full year for local planning, without the expectation of implementation, localities can have the time to develop a strong and well-conceived set of action strategies. Various funding approaches once implementation begins, including one-time expenditures, rollovers, and reallocation strategies, also help to ensure that funds can be spent in communities.

Once they receive funding, local councils are caught between practical and political demands. Localities need sufficient time to establish their goals and strategies and develop their plans, but at the same time, they must spend funds to establish services to children and families quickly enough to maintain political support for their efforts. Requiring funds to be spent in a narrow time frame puts the entire initiative in a Catch-22 predicament. If localities have funds left at the end of the year, they risk having the next year's allotment cut. On the other

hand, if local councils act precipitously and projects fail, they jeopardize the entire initiative. Says a Massachusetts participant, "To plan, local councils must consider and forecast: Are the families going to be there; are they going to have moved; how many openings will they have; how long will the program funding last?" During initial start up, councils are constantly acquiring new data and learning as they go. "They must continually readjust and that makes it harder to run a local council financing structure than legislators may realize."

State boards, of course, must hold localities accountable for timely and effective action. However, states are beginning to realize that they need to develop funding policies that support localities' fledgling efforts. When communities are consistently behind deadlines, state boards must ask why. Expectations may be too ambitious—launching a complex initiative across an entire state rather than phasing in the initiative starting with the strongest sites puts enormous pressure on state staff and local councils. State offices may not be able to offer adequate guidance and technical assistance. Requiring that an effective plan be written, approved, and implemented all within the first year of funding may also be unrealistic. But that may be what it takes to get the job done.

- South Carolina's First Steps initiative was implemented simultaneously in all 46 counties. Each local council struggled to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment, develop a strategic plan, and spend their portion of the state's $20 million allocation, as required, within a year. When the counties had not spent, or even requested, their allocations within six months, the state office faced tremendous criticism from the legislature. In hindsight, advocates in South Carolina believe that this political backlash could have been avoided if First Steps had been implemented more slowly, with the first year of funding established for planning or pilot implementation and the second year earmarked for full-scale implementation.

- North Carolina acknowledges the tension between planning and establishing local initiatives and the pressure to quickly implement strategies and draw down funds, but emphasizes the necessity of working within a political window of opportunity. It is essential that local councils spend each year's allocation by the deadline in order to maintain the initiative's momentum, argue persuasively for funding increases, and expand the system of services over the long run. "It seems impossible, but you just do it anyway because you have to keep the initiative moving and rolling out. It's hard, but it is an opportunity that you will not have again if you botch it, so you've just got to keep pushing," according to a state leader.

"To plan, local councils must consider and forecast.... They must continually readjust and that makes it harder to run a local council financing structure than legislators may realize."

—An expert in Massachusetts

- To assist local councils in their planning efforts, Kansas allows payment for start-up costs incurred within the 90-day period immediately preceding the date of the award, if they are necessary for the "effective and economical conduct of the grants." Knowing that these costs will be reimbursed by the grant allows local councils to establish themselves and begin their assessments and planning immediately.

Allow One-Time Expenditures

It takes strong and decisive leadership at state and local levels to develop a disciplined spending strategy, especially in the face of tight deadlines. Some localities have successfully used initial funding to strengthen their existing early childhood system through one-time expenditures. They can be planned as part of a long-term strategy but they need not be. In either case, such purchases have an immediate positive impact. They help develop a supply of materials and goods essential for quality programs—and swiftly capture the attention and support of providers. They also have the advantage of creating a sense of accomplishment and momentum without locking councils into ongoing commitments they are not yet ready to make. As one state participant advises, "It is better to invest in one-time projects that get you in a better place than if you start spending on long-term things and then decide to change course." Making too many abrupt changes early on can lessen community confidence and make the council's work much more difficult. One-time-only expenditures make it possible for communities to use funds effectively while buying the time to refine a workable, long-term strategy.

- The local commission in California's Alameda County gave one-time grants of up to $3,000 to local providers for any inside or outside physical improvement. This small investment allowed providers to quickly benefit from the initiative. Because service providers felt appreciated and supported, they willingly bought in to the initiative. The initiative also gained support from the community-at-large when parents and residents saw their children playing on newer, safer playgrounds and equipment. As a result, providers and other members of the community who knew how the Proposition 10 funds were being invested were eager to defend the initiative when the tobacco industry attempted to defeat and rescind the tobacco tax that supported the initiative one year after passage.

- North Carolina's local partnerships used early Smart Start funds to make one-time-only improvements in the quality of early childhood services. They decided to help child care programs prepare for accreditation by

purchasing "those kinds of things that providers never had money for," such as training and equipment, according to a participant.

A major one-time expenditure can be a new capital project. New construction funds for facilities are desperately needed in many communities. California, Massachusetts, and North Carolina have allowed local councils to allocate local initiative funds for this purpose and communities in all three states have chosen to take advantage of this option. Massachusetts' local councils have had a hard time, however, spending the funds within the required period. According to one state expert, "You cannot do major capital construction within a 12-month cycle minus the number of months it takes to get the appropriation to the local level. Extending the cycle for spending Community Partnership dollars on capital projects would be ideal."

Permit Rollover Funding

Several states have made provision for extending the funding cycle by allowing funds to be rolled over from one budget year to the next. In North Carolina, until 2001 funds could be carried forward. California has no deadline for the use of funds. This makes it possible for local councils to engage either in capital construction that may take more than one year to complete or in multi-stage planning that may require less funding in one year and more in another. California even permits its local commissions to invest rolled over funds to build up an endowment.

Allowing localities to carry forward unspent funds has the potential to encourage more strategic, efficient, and creative use of state dollars. However, this strategy raises both political and technical concerns.

First, rollover provisions do not always eliminate the pressure to spend allocations on schedule. Even those explicitly designed to ensure that funds earmarked for children cannot be reclaimed for other purposes do not always work as intended. The public visibility of unspent funds, regardless of their intended future use, can create enormous dissonance in a highly competitive social services climate. It can also minimize political support not only for the initiative but also for other child and family services, as state officials seek to redirect unspent funds to replace existing funding.

- Even though members of the North Carolina legislature allow local partnerships to roll over new funds for one year, unspent funds are still vulnerable when other parts of the state budget are being cut. In FY 2000,

political pressure forced Smart Start to give up unspent money to the general treasury rather than rolling it over—or even earmarking it for use in child and family services. In 2001, partnerships were no longer allowed to carry forward unspent funds from one year to the next.

- In Massachusetts, local partnerships are encouraged to review their spending targets every six months. Since there is no rollover provision in Massachusetts, communities must spend their entire allocation within a 12-month period.

Second, local councils with limited fiscal experience may not have the accounting procedures in place to track rolled over funds. Surplus dollars can easily be confused with current allocations. This allows localities to mistakenly assume, for example, that the funds they have available in the first quarter will be available in each successive quarter. If a local council decides to fund ongoing services, it may find it does not have enough money to honor its commitments once the front-end surplus has been spent. To avoid these problems, localities need to hire experienced administrative staff and carefully select their fiscal agents. States should take account of these concerns in guidelines and provide appropriate technical assistance.

Allow Reallocation of Unspent Funds Among Local Councils

When some communities have trouble spending their funds it may not be an issue of time but one of capacity. In order to protect funds, states need to consider when state dollars should be reallocated to other communities rather than rolled over for future use in the same community or returned to the state treasury.

Some states allow reallocation and encourage localities to decide voluntarily when this should be done. In North Carolina, for example, local councils that are not on target to spend down funds in the allotted period can return a portion to their state board. The funds are then given by the state board to another council able to use them in the remaining funding period. Only if the receiving council fails to spend the additional funds will the unused amount go back to the state's general revenue fund. Voluntary reallocation does not affect the local council's allocation for the next year.

Local councils should make every effort to voluntarily return funds so they may be used by another council rather than risk appearing as if they have no need for their allocation and having a portion involuntarily returned to the general state revenue fund.

Make It Easier for Localities to Use Program Funds

Local councils are expected to pull together a variety of state, federal, and local resources and use them more effectively to meet the comprehensive needs of young children and families. Categorical funding rules often make this difficult to do. State boards can help local councils eliminate some of these obstacles by granting waivers and special exceptions. Waivers make it possible for local councils to act as though certain program requirements do not exist. This can result in more flexible use of existing funds. However, it is critical that waivers not be used to undermine basic protections and service levels for children and families.

The legislatures in Colorado and Florida (neither of which provides substantial new state funds to local councils) permit their respective state initiatives to grant waivers in certain instances. Between September 1997 and January 1999, Colorado's Consolidated Child Care Pilot Program, which supports 18 local councils, submitted 68 formal waiver requests, 61 of which were ultimately approved. An evaluation conducted by the Center for Human Investment Policy and the Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation at the University of Colorado found that the process increased flexibility for the communities and made it possible for pilot programs to use a variety of funds to meet their prioritized needs.

- Several Colorado communities requested waivers so that programs funded by different sources with different eligibility and funding guidelines could operate with one set of rules. Both Head Start and Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) funds were used to provide child care, but the two programs had different parent payment requirements for low-income families. Parents at or below the federal poverty line received part-day Head Start at no cost but had to pay a fee for extended services that were funded in part through CCCAP. Many parents could not afford this charge. Communities asked that CCCAP fees be waived for parents with incomes at 100 percent of the federal poverty level or lower so that full-day care would be affordable for more low-income children.

States should understand that waivers intended to eliminate obstacles to local service delivery do not *permanently* change program rules across the board; nor are they a substitute for needed *new* funds. In addition, the waiver process itself can be cumbersome. Addressing these challenges requires senior state level support and participation as well as the cooperation of heads of several relevant local agencies. To effectively decrease barriers to collaboration among agencies and increase opportunities to draw on multiple funding streams, states should have a clear waiver submission and approval process established *before* the local

planning process begins. The state board should clearly define the person or persons (for example, the heads of agencies sitting on the local councils) who will have the authority to submit waiver requests, as well as the department(s) with the authority to approve the waiver requests. It should also communicate the process in writing to all local boards in its guidelines or technical assistance documents. When agencies are not thoroughly invested in the local planning process, or when in the case of multi-county efforts, agencies in two or more counties must agree to a waiver request, the process often does not work well.

- Because the Colorado process requires that local councils' waiver requests come from the involved agencies, the application and approval process can be especially time consuming when waivers are needed from agencies that are not represented on local councils. Obtaining a waiver from a program within the Division of Child Welfare, for example, was stalled in one county because the council had no relationship with a local representative from that agency. The state had to play a strong role in educating division staff about the intent of the Consolidated Child Care pilots and the need for waivers.

Encourage Efforts to Leverage Additional Resources

Involvement in state initiatives can open new sources of local investment, especially when it brings an influx of new money or publicity. Localities should be encouraged to leverage their participation in innovative state efforts into additional public and private support. Successful efforts should be recognized as a major contribution of the initiative and as evidence of local effectiveness.

- In California, Florida, and Massachusetts, foundations are investing in early childhood programs they might otherwise not have. Some California foundations are considering supporting the work of local councils because they recognize that Proposition 10 funds will increase the effectiveness of their own dollars. In Massachusetts, foundations interested in universal early education were impressed by the comprehensive planning efforts of local councils and decided to financially assist them. Although Florida does not have a large number of foundations, in several counties, including Sarasota and Miami-Dade, foundations are contributing to the effort.

- In North Carolina, local Smart Start partnerships have leveraged new federal dollars for community efforts. For example, Smart Start funding provided seed money for Early Head Start and Head Start expansion programs. A partnership in Chatham County received a $3 million federal

grant for community safety. This tiny community built such an effective partnership and new services that it was able to successfully compete in a national grant process against much larger cities.

It is important to recognize innovative efforts to develop local support. However, requiring localities to assume the full responsibility for funding the council's administration, as well as generating additional program funds, is not realistic. Without an adequate influx of state dollars to leverage new funding outlets, local partnerships must compete against their own members for existing resources. Fee-for-service solutions, in which revenue is increased by passing costs on to the consumer, may sound like an attractive option. While this is a successful business strategy and may be appropriate in some communities, it should be carefully applied in initiatives designed to better meet the health and education needs of young children and their families.

- Florida's requirement that communities help raise funds by imposing new co-payments on low-income parents using prekindergarten programs raised only $5 million statewide. It also had other drawbacks. The policy conflicted with the goals of a number of local councils that are interested in establishing universal prekindergarten. In addition, some families who were using the prekindergarten program, which had previously been offered free of charge, chose to leave rather than pay an unanticipated fee they had not budgeted for and could not afford.

A significant number of communities may have minimal, if any, additional sources from which to leverage resources and are going to be dependent on state funds to improve conditions for children and families.

Identify and Support Local Capacity

This section discusses the need for states to understand the varying capacities of local councils. Resources must be provided so that every council may adequately staff and manage both administrative and programmatic responsibilities. States need to provide timely basic training and offer ongoing technical assistance that pays attention to local needs and uses a variety of teaching and learning formats, including Internet-based information sharing.

The success of local initiatives depends to a large extent on how ready partners are to strike out on a new course for children and families. Not every community that participates in a state early childhood initiative begins the process fully equipped to undertake the considerable challenges involved. Some state-driven local early childhood initiatives, such as those in California, Florida, and Massachusetts, have involved all counties from the start. Other states, such as Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, and North Carolina, have taken a more gradual approach and initially involved only a select number of counties.

States beginning with a small number of communities often identify localities with a high degree of readiness. North Carolina strategically chose to launch its Smart Start initiative in pilot counties with varying degrees of readiness, in part, to determine the range of technical assistance needs as well as community strengths. Regardless of whether state initiatives start small or are implemented statewide, state boards should make sure that localities, once chosen, have the administrative resources, initial training, and ongoing technical assistance to develop local capacity and make the best use of this

It is important to earmark sufficient funds specifically for administration. In virtually every case, new dollars are necessary to ensure that localities are able to hire sufficiently skilled staff. While some states tend to conceive of local councils as purely planning bodies, they are also expected to implement their plans and build fiscal and programmatic accountability. Nor does the responsibility for monitoring program effectiveness and program contracts diminish over time.

opportunity. States also need to help package what local councils have learned and assist them in communicating their successes.

- North Carolina's local partnerships, which were phased in over a period of five years from 1993 to 1998, are now the best established of any state. The state Smart Start partnership works actively to distill and share what local partnerships are doing that works. Four state partnership staff focus entirely on public outreach and education. The partnership distributes a statewide newsletter, the *Smart Start Times*, and coordinates communications through an advisory committee of local partnerships and public relations experts who have volunteered to help shape statewide communications strategies.

  Staff have developed a communications tool kit with sample press releases, fact sheets, newsletters, and promotional materials for localities to adapt. They help local councils devise strategies to develop new champions and use storytelling to more effectively communicate success and build support. The state also works with private corporations to develop public awareness materials to promote the importance of the early childhood years.

Know Where Localities Are Starting

Early on, state initiatives solicit local plans by issuing a request for proposals. A well-designed request for proposal process can help states identify local capacity by asking several important questions: What previous collaborative experience have applicant communities had? What has been the impact of this collaboration? Is there evidence that primary stakeholders are substantially involved and likely to provide strong collaborative leadership? Is there sufficient organizational expertise and funding to staff and administer the collaborative's work over years, not just weeks? What factors suggest that local efforts are positioned to fundamentally restructure and improve early childhood education and services rather than simply to bring in additional dollars for existing programs? How supportive is the community climate?

Few communities will rank highly on all of these measures. However, a careful state-level review of community factors can suggest the specific areas in which additional resources, training, and technical assistance will be most needed. Even the best-prepared communities will need strong state support early on and continuing throughout implementation.

Ensure Adequate Staffing and Management Support

Local councils, like state boards, must have a budget sufficient to adequately staff and manage their ongoing work. The job of a local council is to oversee the design and implementation of a comprehensive early childhood plan. It must also maintain accountability for results, build public awareness, and expand funding to meet its goals. Full-time staff with different types of expertise are needed to pull together the council structure and implement procedures; to collect and analyze data; ensure that plans, activities, and policies adhere to state guidelines; maintain financial records and documentation, fiscal contracts, and agreements; oversee day-to-day project implementation and evaluation; and make recommendations for policy changes and revisions in strategic direction. In short, local councils require adequate budgets to support a variety of both routine and special activities ranging from public outreach and resource assessment to consultant fees and office operation.

It is important to earmark sufficient funds specifically for administration. In virtually every case, new dollars are necessary to ensure that localities are able to hire sufficiently skilled staff. While some states tend to conceive of local councils as purely planning bodies, they are also expected to implement their plans and build fiscal and programmatic accountability. Nor does the responsibility for monitoring program effectiveness and program contracts diminish over time.

Without efficient administration, children and families are not likely to benefit from the initiative's resources as fully as possible. Several state initiatives have increased local council funding for administrative costs, but in most cases, the amount is extremely low. Experience suggests that this tendency to underfund administration is penny-wise and pound-foolish. Inadequate allocations lead to false choices between meeting appropriate staff needs and providing services for children and families. The price paid is long-term erosion in the initiative's capacity and the quality of services.

- Florida provided a small amount to local councils for planning, but administrative funds were not appropriated until after the first round of planning was completed. The state now allows local councils to use 5 percent of their total allocation for coalition and service provider administration.

- Iowa allows communities to use 3 percent of their School Ready (state general revenue) funds and 5 percent of their Early Childhood (federal TANF dollars) allocation for administration of their local community empowerment initiatives. Although this may appear generous, for most

Even with adequate resources, most localities will need considerable assistance as they undertake cross-sector work. Well-designed training builds local confidence and a strong foundation for collaborative capacity. The type and intensity of training will vary with the degree of state funding, the expertise of local councils and staff, and where councils are in the planning process.

local councils this amounts to too few dollars. In the Lakes Area, the local community empowerment council receives $600,000 of School Ready funding. Three percent, or $18,000, can be used to administer the community empowerment effort. The council also receives $39,000 of Early Childhood funds—5 percent, or $1,950, of which can be used for administration, for a total of $19,950 to administer a community initiative encompassing four counties. To make matters worse, the council must account for each source of funds separately. This creates a paperwork burden for a council already lacking in administrative funding and staff.

- In North Carolina, some local partnerships' administrative funds are capped at $100,000 or no more than 8 percent, whichever is lower, of their total allocation. However, for counties funded after 1997, the cap was reduced to $50,000 in an effort to limit administrative costs and direct a larger portion of local allocations to programs and services. This makes it even more difficult for new partnerships, which often must build considerable administrative capacity as they start up. The capping of administrative costs has had a significant effect on all of the local partnerships in North Carolina. Smaller, rural partnerships find it difficult to afford more than minimal administrative staff and to establish an effective organization.

Provide Basic Training

Even with adequate resources, most localities will need considerable assistance as they undertake cross-sector work. Well-designed training builds local confidence and a strong foundation for collaborative capacity. The type and intensity of training will vary with the degree of state funding, the expertise of local councils and staff, and where councils are in the planning process.

Many members of newly formed councils have considerable skill in designing and implementing programs and serving on traditional oversight boards. Most, however, come with little or no experience in comprehensive planning efforts. It can take many local councils a good while to fully appreciate the difference between adding and overseeing programs and building systems. Without a considerable degree of assistance, community councils can easily get off on the wrong track and spend funds on piecemeal efforts that do not help them achieve their state's goals or their own.

Localities are eager to find out as much information as they can early on. Staff and council members want nuts and bolts information on how to structure and select their council membership beyond that provided in written guidelines as well as training in basic administrative procedures and meeting management. They also want advice in process areas such as collaboration or community assessment, and in more technical areas including financing and data collection. Ideally, basic training provides both specific front-end information and an overview of areas in which they will need more assistance later.

- Communities in Kansas had a very short time to pull together their Smart Start councils, define their needs and resources, and develop a plan. The state's request for proposals was released in July 2000, plans were due by mid-October and implementation was scheduled to begin on January 1, 2001. Staff of the Kansas Children's Cabinet held three meetings in different regions across the state to provide technical assistance to local councils applying for funding. The board also provided questions and answers regarding the applications process and grant requirements on their Web site for council members who had been unable to attend any of the three regional technical assistance sessions.

- The South Carolina First Steps state office provided training, as necessary, to county partnerships. Needs at the beginning of the planning process ran the gamut from training on how to run a meeting, to ensuring and managing council diversity, to legal matters such as understanding the bylaws and avoiding conflict of interest.

- North Carolina put considerable effort into training on collaboration as Smart Start local partnerships were being formed and starting to plan. A consultant organized three-day sessions for each local partnership, which provided an opportunity to work on their strategic plans as well as to learn techniques to foster collaboration.

Offer Ongoing Technical Assistance

Training and technical assistance are important in a local council's early stages and equally necessary on an ongoing basis. According to an expert in North Carolina, "providing technical assistance is a huge, huge challenge. You need to pay for it, and because local staff change in their positions, you never get through training." As with basic training, the technical assistance to be provided will depend on each council's circumstances.

"Providing technical assistance is a huge, huge challenge. You need to pay for it, and because local staff change in their positions, you never get through training."

—An expert in North Carolina

Once councils have been formed, the need for more in-depth, problem-solving support increases, making technical assistance one of the most important elements of successful local initiatives. "Providing technical assistance is challenging, costly, and the demand is unending," says a state expert. But it is an area to which experts agree they would give more attention, not less. States are wise to anticipate that a variety of political concerns will arise even in the strongest local councils and should ensure that adequate technical assistance is available to help localities build the capacity necessary to sustain a comprehensive early childhood strategy.

- An evaluation of Colorado's Consolidated Child Care Pilot program found that training provided by the state technical assistance team was one of the most important elements of a successful collaboration. "Through the team member assigned to them, communities had an avenue for access to a variety of state agencies. Beyond that, stakeholders appreciated the opportunity to meet regularly with other pilots at the periodic state-sponsored technical assistance meetings in Denver. In all cases, stakeholders who had participated in the training viewed it as very beneficial to the community."[13]

- The North Carolina Partnership for Children state office has a staff of 60 to oversee and provide guidance to its local partnerships. Ten staff members are responsible solely for training and technical assistance, which is provided through e-mail, phone, on-site visits, and regularly convened conferences. Their expertise covers a broad range of areas including establishing and developing nonprofit organizations, grant writing, and early childhood issues. In addition, the state office contracts with the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina to evaluate the local partnerships' achievements and then identifies and promotes best practices statewide.

- Although Florida sponsored two two-day conferences to help localities develop their School Readiness plans, it became quickly apparent that localities needed more guidance. However, the state partnership had neither the time nor staff to provide on-site technical assistance to all of the local partnerships or even to organize a series of regional technical assistance meetings during the planning process. Instead, it organized weekly technical assistance conference calls. "It was the only thing that allowed the local partnerships to move forward with their planning" said one expert. "If Florida could have done anything better we could most definitely have provided more technical assistance." This was compounded by the fact that local councils were given responsibility for administering early education

and care programs, but the state did not have sufficient accounting staff to train local councils in fiscal management.

- The Proposition 10 Technical Assistance Service Center (TASC) and the California Children and Families Commission (CCFC) coordinate technical assistance to counties. CCFC provides technical assistance on statewide issues through the development of guidelines and the identification and dissemination of promising practices statewide, while TASC offers individualized local support. Designed to help California's 58 county commissions with the implementation of the California Children and Families Act, TASC is staffed by the Center for Health Improvement (CHI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, health policy resource center, and funded by the California Children and Families Association, a consortium of county Proposition 10 commissions, through grants from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the California Endowment.

  The state commission worked with the two private foundations to form TASC in December 1999 in response to county requests for timely and tailored assistance in developing and implementing their local strategic plans and achieving their Proposition 10 goals and objectives. Using a limited pool of funds—$850,000 for all 58 counties—TASC provides on-site and regional services to local commissions through direct technical assistance, regional workshops, and quarterly interactive teleconferences that provide a forum for discussion and inter-county sharing. TASC also provides staff support for subject research and problem-solving and access to an extensive resource library. TASC's team of consultants is available on-site or via phone for a wide variety of program assignments. Frequent areas of assistance include orientation for new commissioners and staff, governance, strategic planning, fiscal leveraging, promising program practices, feasibility studies, grantmaking, and organizational development.

Pay Attention to Local Needs and Vary the Teaching and Learning Format

State experience suggests that localities benefit when states pay attention to local needs and vary the teaching and learning format. Where budgets permit, on-site, periodic, and continuous support from a "coach" can be enormously helpful. Off-site training encourages reflection and team building.

- In the early years of North Carolina's Smart Start initiative, each local partnership was assigned a coach who made observations, offered suggestions, and provided support during the planning process. This type of intensive training was eliminated by the General Assembly in 1995, because it was not

recognized as having a direct impact on children. Later, the legislature came to appreciate the connection among training, the effectiveness of the initiative, and impact on children and families. The state board moved to a series of initial training sessions for recently established partnerships.

- In its first and second years of operation, South Carolina's First Steps office provided funds for the county partnerships to send up to 15 people for training at two three-day technical assistance conferences. They also offered on-site and regional trainings. At large sessions, members of county partnerships from several different communities shared information and strategies. On-site training allowed trainers time to focus on an individual partnership and respond directly to its unique concerns and issues.

- In Iowa, the state developed a technical assistance team with staff from the state departments of Human Services, Education, Public Health, and Human Rights as well as the Office of Empowerment to respond to requests for training in all of these areas from local councils. The team works with education agencies, the Iowa State University extension program, community colleges, and others to provide assistance through a range of methods including handbooks, toolkits, town meetings and forums, state and local conferences, e-mail and phone meetings, site visits, and quarterly meetings for the heads of the local councils.

States can help create opportunities for localities to learn from each other by developing peer-to-peer networks and encouraging communication among localities by phone or e-mail. Local councils, however, need equipment to take advantage of this communications technology.

Providing administrative dollars for computers and on-line capability is essential so that communities have equal access to electronic training provided by the state and available through other Web-based sources. Once established, a Web site is a highly effective way to communicate with local communities and share information about best practices from local partnerships across the state. California, Colorado, Iowa, North Carolina, and South Carolina all have Web sites, which are listed in Appendix II.

- South Carolina's state First Steps office provides continuing technical assistance by answering more than 25 e-mails a day.

- North Carolina's state Smart Start partnership, in addition to providing ongoing training to all local partnerships in the state through conferences

and on-site technical assistance, also makes assistance available through a Web site, www.ncsmartstart.org. The site contains information designed expressly for the local partnerships on several subjects including advocacy and increasing community input. In addition, it has a password-protected area that contains specialized information for local partnerships to use and that allows state staff to quickly respond to local queries.

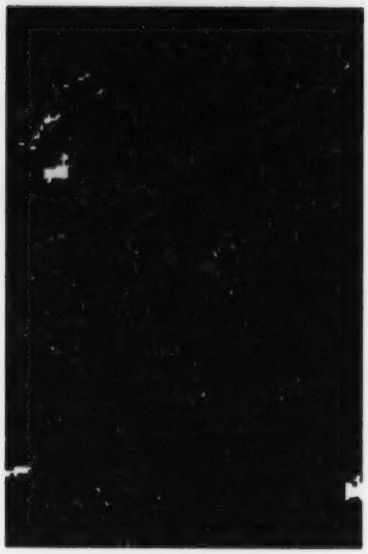
- The Proposition 10 Technical Assistance Service Center in California has an interactive calendar of events and meetings for the early childhood community on its Web site. The calendar facilitates collaboration by allowing users to add meeting dates and locations.

Box 1. Getting the Group to Work

According to the Families and Work Institute, stakeholders do not necessarily come to the table speaking the same language. A good facilitator can help a developing council check assumptions, agree on definitions, and clarify language. This helps to avoid misunderstandings that can cause unnecessary friction or delays later on. An outside facilitator can also:[14]

- Move things along and help the group stick to an agenda
- Use humor to deflect tension
- Set ground rules to mitigate against rivalries and turf battles
- Summarize and acknowledge group accomplishments.

Many initiatives have experienced the "arrive-by-plane" phenomena. A facilitator or consultant from another state or community can often say the same things local leaders might say, but is heard differently because he or she is not seen through the lenses of local relationships or turf issues. Yet localities do not always need to fly in assistance. In many communities there may be professionals well-versed in the challenges of effective communication and collaborative decision-making but with no vested interest in any one sector represented on the local council. The issue is finding someone who is suitably skilled, strongly committed to the initiative's success, and acceptable to all the participants. In many cases, working with a locally or even regionally based facilitator may make it easier to maintain an ongoing relationship and may minimize the time it takes for him or her to understand the history and personalities that shape every collaborative group.



Link Planning to Accountability

Results-based planning creates a framework in which communities set priorities and accept accountability for results. This section briefly describes various planning models that communities can use to clarify their vision and stay on track in implementing their initiatives. States can help localities begin with their objectives in mind by developing results and indicators, making planning a continuous process, sustaining a focus on accountability, providing technical assistance, allowing communities adequate time to plan, and ensuring adequate funding for the planning process.

Comprehensive initiatives are by definition wide-ranging and ambitious undertakings. The name automatically raises expectations—but it should also signal caution. Initiatives that promise everything are likely to disappoint everyone. Planners need to make sure that expectations are reasonable given the needs and resources at hand. The actions they take should demonstrate steady progress and keep them moving toward their broad vision. The time to ensure a snug fit between what initiatives promise and what they can deliver begins early with rational strategies that link planning to accountability and use evaluation to constantly assess and review local efforts.

State and local policymakers need to keep in mind that comprehensive initiatives are intended to do much more than just deliver improved services. Their purpose is to make large-scale improvements in the lives of children and families by designing, strengthening, and coordinating multiple high quality interventions. Ultimately, their aim is to create systems of care and education

Planning based on a shared commitment to specific results and a willingness to accept accountability for measurable progress is best not rushed. Resources are wasted when localities are pushed beyond their ability to deliver a product, regardless of its quality. A poorly conceived plan or one that is not widely supported is not likely to take root.

that connect disparate agencies and funding streams across communities and neighborhoods to make them accessible to all children and families.

State and local leaders of community initiatives need to have a vision of the kind of change they want to create, the results they want to achieve, and what will make change happen. They need to chart the pathways that head toward results, set the indicators or benchmarks that will show whether they are making progress, and hold programs accountable for results as they begin implementation.

Prerequisites to successful implementation of local plans include:

- Adequate resources to support the strategies in the plans
- A culture that allows state and local agencies and programs to work effectively to meet the initiative's goals and toward improved results for children and families
- The capacity to use data to measure the effectiveness of different strategies and determine ways to improve their efforts.

Work Toward a Shared Vision

Developing a shared picture or vision of what supports should be available to children and families in a community is the first step in local planning. This is a complex task because building a comprehensive and integrated system of early childhood services requires sustained commitment and a variety of strategies.

A retreat or special meeting convened in a neutral site with a facilitator offers an opportunity for members of local councils to come together in a supportive environment to reach consensus on a vision. This approach has also helped local council members develop shared trust. Local councils have used other methods to develop and reach consensus on their vision of a comprehensive system, including structured visioning and brainstorming activities and field trips.

Retreats

The communities of Miami-Dade County in Florida and Greenville in South Carolina used strategic planning retreats to develop their visions and begin the planning process.

- Nearly 200 members of the Miami-Dade community participated in a two-and-a-half day meeting to develop the community's vision of every child as healthy and ready to learn when they enter kindergarten, and to draft a plan

for comprehensive services for young children and families. Through a series of 21 community forums, which in total drew thousands of participants, the council's vision was clearly articulated and communicated. The draft plan was clarified and adapted in response to suggestions arising from these discussions. The inclusion of many stakeholders at the initial meeting and the large number of public forums contributed to widespread support from members of the community, as they saw that their suggestions were incorporated into the local plan.

- Members of the First Steps county partnership in Greenville, South Carolina found it helpful to attend a two-day retreat to define their vision and clarify their beliefs. Even though many of the members had collaborated on Greenville's Success by Six initiative for several years, the retreat was still valuable in refining their ideas and solidifying consensus. Once the vision was established, their goals and strategies quickly followed. The Greenville partnership's retreat resulted in agreement on four major goals consistent with the aims of the state's First Steps initiative: to support parents in preparing their children for school; to expand high-quality early childhood care and education; to help create a high quality, stable early care and education workforce; and to build public awareness, understanding, and active support for early care and education.

Visioning and Brainstorming

A structured visioning activity is often used to assist local council members from different programs, agencies, organizations, and parts of the community to focus on their similarities rather than their differences and develop a joint vision. The Families and Work Institute suggests that the exercise begin with asking everyone to pretend to "wave a magic wand, then describe a beautiful dream they have for children and families over the next 5, 10 or 25 years."[15]

Massachusetts' *Guide to Community Partnerships for Children* recommends brainstorming as a technique to aid people from diverse backgrounds in understanding each other's beliefs and reaching a common vision. Brainstorming offers an opportunity for members, who may not have worked together before, to share ideas freely without being concerned about criticism. It gets the conversation started, removes preconceptions, and allows room for creative thinking.

Field Trips

Because local councils are broadly structured and composed of members with different areas of expertise, many members may require a basic education on the individual components—early care and education, health, and family support—of their local system in order to reach consensus on a vision and move forward. Understanding how the programs and services in their communities function and work (or do not work) together gives members a leg up when deciding how best to build on what already exists.

According to an expert from North Carolina, looking at the entire range of services is the only way members of the local councils can "understand enough about what the system for children and families already is. They need to know the pieces of the system they're working with in order to know what it is going to take to get them to what they have envisioned. It can be a problem if they do not really understand how the system works or doesn't work. If a council does not understand a system, and they only think at the program level, they're probably saying, 'Okay, our plan will be to first do this, and then we'll do this.' But they don't have a real sense of what they're building."

Local councils in Colorado and Florida have used field trips to provide a basic education on the early childhood system.

- In Colorado, local council members visited child care programs for a day and were able to experience different types of programs (center-based, family child care, and others) from the perspective of both children and providers. The visits helped local council members develop a vision of quality early childhood programs for all children and identify strategies for moving toward that vision.

- In one Florida community, a participant explained, "We've had new players at the table, people who are not vested in early childhood issues, that need to understand more about them. To help them learn about child care quality, we sent them to a family child care home, a licensed one and an unlicensed informal provider, and to an accredited program. We gave them a real sense of what was out there but gave them no value judgements when we sent them. We just told them, 'These are the various types of programs; you bring back your observations and your recommendations based on that.' Incredibly, people who were not accustomed to looking at child care came back with virtually the same kinds of observations that early childhood experts would have seen. 'Wow, they had so many children in that room, I don't know how they did it.' They noticed some of the quality indicators

that we know are critically important. It took doing some of that kind of homework to develop to a point where we could all agree on what a good quality early child care program should look like."

Develop Results and Indicators

Forming a vision is just the first step in the planning process. Virtually all state early childhood initiatives require that localities engage in careful planning and needs assessment before they receive implementation funds or other state support. Communities can use a variety of planning models and concepts to clarify their vision and stay on track.

Results-based planning can create a framework and systemic way in which communities set priorities and accept accountability for results. According to Sara Watson, it uses "data to show potential supporters where they are going, why they are going in that direction, and the progress they are making."[16] Collecting baseline data helps communities determine where their efforts are most needed and can have the greatest impact. Once implementation begins, continuing data-based feedback can be used to help localities see where mid-course corrections are needed.

State boards can play a major role in encouraging local results-based planning. California, Iowa, and North Carolina have developed explicit definitions of results as a way of helping localities stay focused throughout planning and implementation. Each provides a clear statement of the types of results communities are expected to work toward and a menu of indicators from which localities can choose as they assess their efforts. States should ensure that data are available and accessible for the indicators they suggest and assist communities in measuring their progress.

- California's Children and Families Commission, the state board in charge of local initiatives, is required by the Proposition 10 initiative to define statewide results to be achieved by the local commissions and to "collect and analyze data to measure progress toward attaining such results." The collection and analysis of data at the state level provides an essential support to local commissions that are responsible for implementing results-based plans but do not have the capacity to collect data and measure their performance independently.

  In March 2000, the state commission released a list of desired results that include: integrated, accessible, inclusive, and culturally appropriate supports for families; strengthened family functioning; improved child

State boards can play a major role in encouraging local results-based planning. Several states have provided a clear statement of the types of results communities are expected to work toward and a menu of indicators from which localities can choose as they assess their efforts. States should ensure that data are available and accessible for the indicators they suggest and assist communities in measuring their progress.

development; and improved child health. County commission funding proposals are required to include a description of how they plan to work toward these results, and commissions must report annually on their continuing progress. The state commission has developed indicators to assist counties in measuring their achievements. For example, to assess local progress toward improving supports for families, the state has developed the following indicators: the presence of joint community planning efforts and decisions on revenue maximization and fund allocations; the number of agencies and groups collaborating to provide integrated services that have signed memoranda of understanding with core players outlining their goals and roles; the number of service providers with interdisciplinary training; the number of service and support sites offering more comprehensive services; and the existence and use of centralized resources, such as registries and databases.

- Iowa requires that all community empowerment initiatives work toward three main goals: improving access to early childhood environments, improving children's health, and increasing support for parents. Local councils must demonstrate their progress by reporting annually on a variety of indicators within each of these issue areas. Communities are free to choose from several indicators in each area. To measure improved access to early childhood environments, localities might choose to track, for example, the percentage of eligible three- and four-year-olds in Head Start, the percentage of kindergarten students that attend preschool, and the number of accredited preschool and child care programs. Collecting these data would allow findings to be aggregated at the state level to show improvement and compare progress across communities.

- Local Smart Start partnerships in North Carolina must establish goals and annually evaluate their results. The state partnership recently established a performance-based incentive system that will require local partnerships to assess their achievements in several areas. It sets a minimum standard that local partnerships must meet as well as high performance standards toward which localities should strive. In the area of family support, for example, the state requires local partnerships to serve at least 65 percent of children whose families earn less than 75 percent of the state median income with one of three programs: Head Start, prekindergarten, or subsidized child care. The high performance standard requires local partnerships to serve at least 75 percent of these children. Staff from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina provide technical assistance to local partnerships on how to measure their progress and obtain sound data.

It is important to note that the policy-making process often does not leave room for such a deliberate approach to planning as results-based methods. As we have seen elsewhere in this guide, neither states nor localities always have the resources, time, staff, or expertise to develop strategic implementation plans. Sometimes localities must work backwards; doing what they can, with what they have—hoping it will make a difference. These rational approaches are ideal models. Without adequate resources, local councils will not be able to develop thoughtful plans for their communities.

Facilitate a Community Resource Assessment and Planning Process

State boards should provide support to local councils throughout the complex process of resource assessment and ongoing planning. They should encourage local councils to take advantage of existing data, provide adequate resources, make technical assistance readily available, and establish a reasonable time frame for all aspects of the planning process.

An integral and early part of any planning process is a community assessment that evaluates resources and needs and covers all segments of the community. This assessment can identify gaps in services to be remedied, assist communities in developing realistic goals and strategies, and provide baseline data from which to measure improvement as these strategies are implemented.

Encourage Localities to Use Existing, Available Data

The quality of the final plan will depend on the availability of data and the expertise of the local council in accessing and assembling it. States can assist localities by helping to identify sources of good information and encouraging local councils to take advantage of work that has already been done.

Whenever possible, it is most efficient to use existing information. Some Florida councils, for example, benefited from prior planning done by the state's child care resource and referral network. Kentucky's KIDS NOW initiative is using local child care resource and referral data to assess resources. Broad membership on the local council can make it easier to access information on a range of issues. A representative from Massachusetts explains, "If you have somebody from the health department, you can get good health information. If the school superintendent is active, you'll get good school data."

Box 2. Tips for Community Assessment

The community assessment should:[17]

- Include information that can be understood by members of the local council and others in the community
- Illustrate the circumstances of young children and their families in the area
- Be based on good research and include useful and solid data.

To plan effectively, local councils will need to:

- Know how to use community assessments to better understand a community's resources and needs
- Know what types of data to collect—whether they should collect data on the conditions of children and families, on service delivery and quality, systems capacity, or all of these
- Understand how to find and use existing data
- Understand how to gather new data
- Know how to analyze the data or how to obtain this capacity by partnering with researchers at local colleges or agencies
- Be able to communicate the results of their community assessment in a way that will gain support for the local council's mission from members of the community.

Sometimes statewide assessments can also be a helpful resource to supplement data available locally. Massachusetts has culled child care subsidy data, Head Start data, and early intervention program data to evaluate which sectors of the population have the most need for services. The resulting report, *Setting a Course for Early Education and Care in Massachusetts: Using Data to Guide Policy Development*, compares the full capacity of the early care and education system to population estimates for child age groups and calculates the approximate percentage of the eligible population that is not currently served. The Massachusetts Department of Education also analyzes data on program and capacity, family demographics, classroom quality, and facilities from each of its local councils and then returns the analysis to the communities for their own use as they develop their plans. The state has ongoing data collection efforts as well to help track the initiative's progress over time as local councils implement their strategies. A report on the first three years of this effort was published in April 2001.[18]

Provide Adequate Funding

Conducting a community needs and resource assessment is a complex task that demands support from the state. Ideally, funds and technical assistance earmarked for these assessments should be available to local councils. Usually funding must come from the community's general state allocation. Massachusetts provides guidance on how much a thorough community needs assessment will cost so that local councils understand how much they should budget for the task.

The use of existing resources and information can help limit the expenses that a comprehensive assessment entails. Conducting a single community assessment that obtains data needed by several agencies or programs is another way to maximize information while holding down costs. In Colorado, child care resource and referral agencies and Head Start agencies in rural counties conduct collaborative community assessments to make the most of their limited funding and planning and research capacity.

Offer Technical Assistance

Experts involved in state-driven local initiatives believe that states need to provide adequate funding, strong guidance, technical assistance, and support to help local councils develop plans based on data and focused on results. Even communities that have conducted previous planning for programs in the individual areas of health, child care, and family support, and the few that have up-to-date community assessments in each of these areas, will require technical assistance to synthesize data from all of these sources. Communities that have to start from scratch will need even more. Rural communities especially may have minimal expertise and few resources. The Families and Work Institute (FWI) has developed a tool designed to help communities assess needs and resources.

Specifically, they recommend asking the following questions when planning the community assessment.[19] FWI suggests that the more detailed the responses to these questions are, the better a community will be able to evaluate the resources available for this effort. The state agency can provide technical assistance to help local councils answer these questions in the most effective way possible.

1. What are you trying to learn? What kinds of information do you need?
2. What data describing the needs of your community already exist?
3. Can you get access to these data? How?
4. What will these data tell you? What won't they tell you?

Members of local councils need to know why certain data are collected, why information is important, and what it tells them about the needs of young children and families in their communities. They also need to know what local resources already exist. If council members are involved in the community assessment, they will better understand why and how they need to improve services and supports for young children and their families.

5. What is the best way to gather the data about community and system strengths and resources as well as needs and service gaps?
6. What resources do you need in order to gather this information?
7. How will you secure these resources?
8. How will you assure that the data you collect will give you a representative, meaningful picture of needs?
9. What role will families—the customers of early childhood systems—play in planning, conducting, and analyzing the results of your needs assessment?
10. What role will other stakeholders play in planning, conducting, and analyzing the results of your needs assessment?
11. How will you communicate the results of your needs assessment to:
    - your local planning group
    - families in your community
    - elected officials
    - state, county, and local planning boards and commissions
    - federal, state, county, and local government agencies
    - public and private providers of programs serving children and their families
    - employers, unions, and employee associations
    - grant makers and public policymakers
    - the general public
    - the media?

When local expertise in conducting a community assessment is not readily available, some local councils have turned to independent consultants to determine community needs. State experts caution against relying solely on this method because consultants will not be around for the next steps in the initiative. Members of the local councils need to know why certain data were collected, why information is important, and what it tells them about the needs of young children and families in their communities. They also need to know what local resources already exist. If council members are involved in the community assessment, they will better understand why and how they need to improve supports for young children and their families.

State efforts to support results-based planning can begin early with guidelines that encourage broad and strategic council membership. It should continue through initial training and ongoing technical assistance. The following examples suggest how effectively states can translate local experience into statewide technical assistance.

- The Florida Partnership for School Readiness offered help to localities in collecting and analyzing data at a statewide technical assistance conference. It devised a model plan from several that were submitted early in the review process. The intent was to develop a tool that contained an example and an explanation of a community assessment, including an inventory of services and an analysis of service strengths and gaps. The model was distributed so that other local partnerships could use it to guide their own assessments.

- Massachusetts' Department of Education's Office of Early Learning Services developed a standardized planning tool based on the assessment originally submitted by the Boston partnership.[20] It provided a thorough inventory of needs and resources as well as comprehensive information gathered from an existing community assessment. Boston's plan included data on the number of children in working families, the number of children already in care, types of available care, providers' hours of operation, the costs of programs, the number of programs that were accredited and/or licensed, and the number of children who needed care but were not being served. The state used Boston's submission as the basis of a statewide prototype which localities were free to adapt and refine. A Massachusetts blueprint for community assessments can be found in Appendix III.

Allow Time

As every state in this guide can attest, effective planning takes time. When states establish local planning initiatives, they often do not build in a reasonable schedule to begin, much less fully develop, a results-based approach. The consequences are predictable: at the very least, local councils may not all meet their deadlines; at the worst, design and implementation suffer.

The period from grant announcement to implementation is often highly compressed. Local councils with experience working collaboratively have a definitive advantage over those communities just getting started. Even so, planning based on a shared commitment to specific results and a willingness to accept accountability for measurable progress is best not rushed. Resources are wasted when localities are pushed beyond their ability to deliver a product, regardless of its quality. A poorly conceived plan or one that is not widely supported is not likely to take root.

- During the first year of Florida's Partnership for School Readiness initiative, an impractical deadline imposed by the legislature meant that, even with guidance from the state, only one-quarter of its counties were able to submit

Local councils cannot always anticipate every future possibility. As a result, it is important that states allow communities the flexibility to revisit and reevaluate their plans at regular intervals. Results-based planning for systems change is an iterative process that requires continuous measurement of the performance of the strategies included in local plans.

complete plans that were ready for approval by the state deadline. Fortunately, the state's strong child care resource and referral network had already conducted extensive community assessments in certain areas. Some local councils were able to save time by "piggybacking" on these findings in developing their plans.

- In Iowa, several communities decided to forgo a round of Community Empowerment funding in order to give more time to planning. The Northwest Iowa Community Empowerment Area, comprised of Cherokee, Lyon, Plymouth, and Sioux counties, needed time to improve the local council's structure, enhance community awareness, and develop community partnerships. The Harrison-Monona-Shelby Community Empowerment Area's local council in rural western Iowa, with a combined population of less than 40,000, knew it would develop a better plan if it spent more time building solid community support and a coordinated approach.

Make Taking Stock a Continuous Process

While initial plans should be well thought out, local councils cannot always anticipate every future possibility. As a result, it is important that states allow communities the flexibility to revisit and reevaluate their plans at regular intervals. Local initiatives must stay reasonably on course and remain conscious of the need to show accomplishments or risk losing political and financial support for their efforts. However, results-based planning for systems change, experts agree, is an iterative process that requires continuous measurement of the performance of the strategies included in local plans.

Encouraging localities to periodically take stock of their programs, strategies, and overall vision allows local councils to revise their plans based on progress toward their stated goals and objectives. Some experts recommend that local councils review their plans quarterly to determine how close they are to reaching set targets, adjust their strategies if they are not achieving these goals, and reevaluate how the original goals can realistically be met.

- Massachusetts encourages its councils to reevaluate progress every six months.

- North Carolina's Orange County partnership develops a new plan every year. Members are constantly involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation process to ensure that the services and programs sponsored by the partnership continue to meet the community's needs. It took seven years to build and fine tune a comprehensive system. It grew piece by piece,

with the community gradually adding and expanding efforts to enhance quality through increased staff training and retention and to help families afford care through the use of subsidies.

It is important that local councils and community service providers understand the results they are expected to achieve from the outset and the consequences of low performance. States should clearly communicate their expectations and establish a process that helps local councils to assess their initiative's progress and hold programs accountable for expected results. States should, for example, require local councils to regularly measure their performance and provide assistance and guidance to councils for this undertaking. States should also establish a system that holds programs accountable for results, rewards high performance, and contains mechanisms to improve programs that are not achieving their goals.

- In North Carolina, projects funded with Smart Start dollars must be put out for bid every two years. This bidding process offers local partnerships the opportunity to change providers or defund strategies if they are consistently not meeting performance targets. North Carolina's state partnership provides substantial support to the local partnerships to help them with accountability and the evaluation of services. In this way, the state and local partnerships share responsibility for results. In one local partnership, there are typically 30 funded activities in a given two-year cycle and approximately two are defunded every year. Says one state expert, "Although this causes a lot of consternation in communities, we cannot continue to fund programs that do not do what they say they are going to do. We funded a community organization to do information and resource and referral for families over a three-county area. We took money away from them, because they were not doing the job—they were not reaching families, and the local partnership decided not to fund them anymore. The partnership redirected the funds to another strategy. Whoever manages the contract might be changed if they are not doing it the right way or getting the right results. The money is not being taken from programs for children."

Box 3. Improving Performance and Increasing Accountability

When local programs and strategies do not meet their goals, there are several ways to improve their performance and increase accountability. In her paper, *Informed Consent: Advice for State and Local Leaders on Implementing Results-Based Decisionmaking*, Sara Watson includes a series of consequences that states and local councils can use to increase accountability. These can be used to support improvement at the individual and organizational level: [21]

- Private reward and pressure by supervisors and peers
- Public reward and pressure
- Tangible rewards for success
- Increased autonomy
- Increased assistance
- Reduced autonomy/increased oversight
- Reduced or transferred funding
- Changing or terminating employment.

A Case Study: Planning in Alameda County, California

In California's Alameda County, members of the county Children and Families Commission and staff broke into two work groups, one on child care and another on family support and parenting needs. Taking a results-based approach, the work groups, which shared members and formed a bridge committee to share each others' work, developed separate action plans and then combined them to create the commission's overall plan. The plan takes a cross-disciplinary approach to supporting children and families by focusing on the home, child care, and the community.

The work groups first defined critical needs of children birth to five and their families. They catalogued existing services available to meet those needs and identified service gaps. This information provided a basis for developing service-delivery strategies that maximized existing services and were not duplicative. The work group on child care used data on the need for quality child care and barriers to high quality child care that had recently been gathered by a countywide child care planning council. The county's child care planning council, which was established prior to Proposition 10, identified a severe staffing shortage, citing a trend that showed child care teachers with Bachelor's degrees were moving into other types of employment as California's economy thrived. It also noted the increased demand for child care as a result of

A Case Study: Planning in Alameda County, California (continued)

welfare reform and a strong economy, and significant shortage of resources for staff recruitment and training, facility development, and parent education and support.

To determine gaps in services, the child care planning council collected other data on child care needs and available resources including: the number of licensed child care facilities in the county; the number of children in full- or part-time care; the number of staff; the number of family child care homes and centers; the amount of revenue generated for child care programs in the county through parent fees, subsidies, and grants; a breakdown of state and federal subsidy dollars; the geographic distribution of child care facilities and funding throughout the county; and the geographic distribution of staff turnover. It also looked at staff turnover by level of training and qualifications—for example, teachers who specialized in infant/toddler or special needs care.

The work group on family support and parenting needs gathered indicators such as the number of annual births, the number of low-weight births, the number of births to teen mothers, and the number of newborns testing positive for drugs. It also collected information on resources, including available case management resources; child care programs; parent education and support groups; services to address disabilities and special needs; health and medical providers; dental providers; hotlines and warmlines; services for homeless persons; family resource centers; child respite services; drug and alcohol rehabilitation services; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) home visiting programs; environmental tobacco smoke prevention education; and smoking cessation services.

The commission used the needs and resource assessment and gap analysis to establish four goals:

- Support optimal parenting, all-around health, and economic self-sufficiency for families
- Ensure that every child from birth to age five reaches his or her developmental potential and is ready for school
- Promote optimal physical and mental health for all children from birth to age five
- Create an integrated, coordinated system of care that maximizes existing resources and minimizes duplication of services.

A Case Study: Planning in Alameda County, California (continued)

For each goal, the commission developed outcomes they wanted to achieve, strategies to attain the outcomes, process measures to assess how well the strategies were being implemented, and outcome indicators to measure progress toward achieving their desired outcomes. For example, to achieve the commission's goal of improving the development and school readiness of young children from birth to five, the commission defined three desired outcomes: improved child social and emotional well-being, improved access to high quality child care, and improved kindergarten performance. An overview of the Alameda commission's outcomes, strategies, and process measures is contained in Appendix IV.

Box 4. A Results-Based Planning Approach

One well-developed approach to results-based planning is described in a paper for the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, *Results Accountability for Proposition 10 Commissions: A Planning Guide for Improving the Well-Being of Young Children and Their Families*.[22] This planning technique used by county commissions in California requires local councils to select results and indicators, identify a baseline, develop an action plan and budget for achieving their desired results for young children and families, measure performance, and weigh the costs and benefits of their efforts.

Define Results

The author of *Results Accountability for Proposition 10 Commissions*, Mark Friedman of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, suggests that local councils begin the process of results-based planning by asking themselves, "What do we want for our young children?" The answer to this question spells out the results they hope to achieve. *A result, or an outcome, is a very broad, positive statement about what communities want for their children.* It refers to a bottom-line condition of well-being that a cross-section of the community agrees is essential for every child. For example, children cannot be successful unless they are healthy and begin school ready to learn. Achieving these results community-wide requires that multiple needs are fully, not minimally, met. Doing so demands the contribution of many sectors in the community.

Identify Indicators of Results

Friedman next suggests that councils ask themselves, "How would we recognize and measure these results in our day-to-day lives in the

Box 4. A Results-Based Planning Approach (continued)

community? What would we see, hear, feel, and observe?" The answers to these questions spell out the indicators that show whether the conditions we want to achieve exist or not. *An indicator—sometimes referred to as a benchmark—is defined as a measure, for which there are data, that gauges community-level progress toward each agreed upon result.*

Results, by definition, reflect a collection of met needs. So it is not surprising that no single indicator is likely to adequately track progress toward broad results. Communities need to adopt a set of indicators that together show progress on each result. The final list should be manageable, powerful, and possible. It is helpful if councils keep the number of results and the number of indicators to a manageable few. They should pick indicators that show the most powerful connection to results—ones that ideally either research or at least common sense suggests are likely to predict progress toward the intended result. Data to measure them should be readily available, valid, reliable (they measure what they say they measure), and routinely collected. For example, children entering school ready to learn is a frequently agreed upon result. Reasonable indicators might include the number of fully immunized five-year-olds or children tested and treated for vision and hearing. These are appropriate trackers, clearly linked to school readiness, and already collected by local health departments in many communities.

Develop a Baseline, Action Plan, and Budget for Achieving Results
The next step in this approach requires members of local councils to ask: "What will it take to get us to our desired results?" For each indicator, Friedman suggests that local councils collect current data to establish a baseline reading. This will sketch a picture of what the conditions are for children in their community and what it will look like if nothing changes. Localities can then define reasonable expectations for success "as doing better than the baseline."

What will it take to do "better than baseline"? A community assessment and gap analysis can be done to show what is available—and what is needed. By reaching out to a range of stakeholders with a vested interest in the community and access to resources, a council can begin to develop an action plan and a budget designed to improve conditions in relation to the baseline. Specific activities are implemented not because they are easy or available but because they are clearly related to achieving results as measured by indicators. A long-range financing plan helps develop the means to pay for what is needed.

Box 4. A Results-Based Planning Approach (continued)

Measure Performance

While results-based budgeting is a community planning model, it recognises that program- or agency-level change is often a prerequisite to community-wide improvement. Change of this kind is tracked by *performance measures*. These are narrow measures that show whether an agency or program is meeting its own organizational goals and objectives. Performance measures set the stage for change. However, improvements in organizational effectiveness are not a substitute for measurable progress in child and family well-being.

Weigh Costs and Benefits

As councils continue to implement a results-based approach, more sophisticated analysis is possible. Additional decision-making tools can help localities define costs in new ways. What are the real costs of doing nothing, for example? How do the costs of achieving positive results stack up against the costs of living with negative outcomes? This kind of information can be a powerful way to more fully inform politicians and taxpayers about the consequences of their budget decisions.

Understand the Uses and Limits of Evaluation

When accountability concerns are woven into the planning process rather than tacked on at the end, evaluation can provide localities with useful guidance and help build support for the initiative. State experience suggests that it is important to know the limitations of various evaluation approaches, design evaluations strategically, and control how they will be used. Localities need the time and resources to accomplish what is being evaluated. When results are poor, states should shape sanctions to address the particular reasons for disappointing performance.

To hold local councils accountable, states use evaluation to determine whether they have met the goals of their plans as well as the overall goals of the state initiative. Policymakers need to know whether local councils funded with state dollars really do help more children enter kindergarten ready for school; if their strategies are improving the lives of children and families; and whether individual programs and services are effective. Continued funding of the state initiative often rests not only on effective planning and implementation, but also on a well-designed evaluation that can document results.

Yet, given the disparate experiences and inequities that children face before entering kindergarten, and differences in children's and families' needs, how can communities achieve school readiness for every child? Low-income children are more likely to confront obstacles, such as health problems, inadequate housing, over-stressed parents, and lack of access to high quality preschool programs, that must be overcome so that they can begin school ready to succeed.

A well-planned, well-conducted, and fully funded evaluation can provide guidance and build support for comprehensive initiatives for young children and families. Yet states should proceed with caution and understand both the uses and limits of the current state of the art. Understanding what evaluations can and cannot do makes it easier for states and localities to control the design of their evaluations and how they are used.

Meeting this challenge is a tall order. When accountability concerns are woven into a results-based planning process from the start, rather than tacked on at the end, the likelihood of making measurable change is greatly improved. Evaluation then becomes a tool for strengthening and guiding progress. As one seasoned researcher put it, "Evaluation doesn't have to be something that is done to your initiative; it's something your initiative does for itself." (For a discussion of results-based planning refer to Chapter 9: *Link Planning to Accountability*.)

An evaluation is a systematic process that observes what is being done and what progress is being made, and it provides feedback about what can be done to better achieve results. A well-planned, well-conducted, and fully funded evaluation can offer guidance and build support for comprehensive initiatives. Yet states should proceed with caution and understand both the uses and limits of the current state of the art. Understanding what evaluations can and cannot do makes it easier for states and localities to control the design of their evaluations and how they are used.

The state initiatives profiled in this report are at various stages of evaluation. Those that have been in existence for several years, such as North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Colorado, have all been assessed by outside evaluators from major universities. Iowa, which initiated its effort in 1998, has created a system of indicators and methods that local councils use to report progress to the state. Evaluation efforts in newer initiatives, such as those in California, Florida, and South Carolina, are still in the planning stage or just being implemented. Their collective experience and the work of others involved in evaluating early childhood initiatives suggest several lessons.

Know the Limitations that Come with Various Evaluation Approaches

Evaluations of early childhood initiatives can answer three different kinds of questions—at three different levels. They can be designed to provide information about *community-level* changes made as a result of the initiative; they can consider the effectiveness of *specific programs*; and they can gather information on the impact of the initiative on *individual children*. Sometimes information collected from individual children is combined so that conclusions can be drawn about larger groups. Each level has its own advantages and limitations.

States and localities should strive to be clear about what they want their evaluation to accomplish and understand the challenges that each approach

poses. Experts eventually hope to develop methods that link all three levels of analysis and show the interactions among them. This is not yet a possible undertaking for most community-based initiatives. Unfortunately, states and localities often expect their evaluation to do it all—not just to evaluate individual achievement or program effectiveness, but to prove the impact of a comprehensive set of approaches on the community at large—and all in the first year or two of effort.

Insufficient funding is one limitation that applies to every level of evaluation. In order to show agreed upon results, evaluations must track progress over several years. These longitudinal designs require extensive staff and technical assistance resources that are often not provided. Lack of funding affects the ability of states and communities to make a difference as well as measure change. North Carolina's approximately $300 million Smart Start budget averages out to a statewide expenditure of just $600 per child. While this investment ranks North Carolina as the most generously funded state initiative in per-child allotment, the amount pales against what it is expected to accomplish. The initiative is designed not only to provide high quality child care, family support, and health services for individual children, but to create a more comprehensive, improved system of care statewide and build public support for quality services for children.

Community-Level Analysis

Evaluations at this level attempt to show the effectiveness of local efforts by tracking community-wide changes with specific indicators. Analysis depends on the availability of statistical measures that are valid, reliable, and clearly linked to essential results, as well as interim measures that document improvements in the conditions needed for progress to occur.

There also must be baseline data against which to show change. State initiatives provide a valuable service by identifying data sources for possible indicators and by encouraging—or requiring—localities to track progress against these measures. Improvements in indicators show clear progress; changes in interim measures can be used to infer the likelihood of progress based on the development of more suitable conditions.

- Iowa tracks whether its community empowerment councils improve health outcomes for children by requiring them to include information on low birth-weight and immunization rates in their annual reports. Localities gather data on participation in various early care and education programs as

Evaluations of early childhood initiatives can answer three different kinds of questions—at three different levels. They can be designed to provide information about community-level changes made as a result of the initiative; they can consider the effectiveness of specific programs; and they can gather information on the impact of the initiative on individual children.

well as the number of accredited child care programs in the community. This local information can then be aggregated to show improvement statewide or to compare progress across communities.

- North Carolina's Smart Start tracks the number of health and developmental screenings and other indicators of child health. Progress has been encouraging. The number of children who received health and developmental screenings rose from 40,000 in 1996 to 297,000 in 2001. By showing such achievement across the state in just five years, the evaluation demonstrates the clear role that these efforts can play in improving school readiness among children.

Limitations

Community-level "report cards" provide valuable data about the status of children and families. However, these evaluations are limited in their ability to show a clear connection between what a specific initiative is doing and its impact on community-wide outcomes. There are several reasons for this.

Limited evaluation techniques. Evaluation methods able to show that an initiative's interrelated set of activities and approaches cause, or fail to cause, specific community-wide improvements are just beginning to be developed. Proving causation is relatively easy in a laboratory setting where variables can be controlled. In community initiatives, however, countless factors are at play. Finding similarly situated, much less matched, pairs of comprehensive initiatives in the same community is highly unlikely. Outcomes are also influenced by a constellation of economic, social, and political factors external to the initiative and over which it has little control. Unexpected changes in administration or leadership, a plant closing and massive layoff, or a crisis that requires the initiative to respond and perhaps change its direction can all affect outcomes.

Lack of positive indicators. There are few statistical indicators available that show improvements in attitude, behavior, and overall well-being—changes that comprehensive initiatives are perhaps best suited to make. The goals of local initiatives, such as school readiness or child health, are comprised of many different components. Typically single measures or even precise definitions of these broad outcomes do not exist. Data that capture important positive indicators, such as parent involvement, are often not collected. It is much easier to find negative measures, such as low birthweight or reports of abuse and neglect. These are helpful but they do not

necessarily reflect many of the significant changes that can result from successful early childhood interventions.

Local variation and development. Local designs and interventions vary widely. This is true even among initiatives following the same state guidelines. In fact, variation is expected as localities identify and meet their own unique needs; it grows as participants change and adapt their efforts. Evaluations are seldom able to sort out all of the variables or to identify their cumulative impact on the initiative's work.

- North Carolina evaluators found dramatic variation in the implementation of Smart Start initiatives from one county to the next, and among different efforts within the same county. It is difficult to say that outcomes resulted from specific interventions when those interventions may have changed significantly over the course of implementation. It is also challenging to make comparisons among local efforts in the same state initiative when the interventions are likely to be different. In order to document the actual strategies that local partnerships are using, evaluators must use a variety of tools, including on-site observations, interviews, and surveys with multiple informants to understand these differences and suggest their influence on outcomes. While necessary, this approach is complicated, staff-intensive, and expensive.

Program-Level Analysis

Program-level evaluation examines the effectiveness of individual services and programs. Evaluations at this level consider performance measures that reflect the achievement of agencies and specific programs and that are within the power of the agency or program to control. They are narrow measures of how well programs are implemented, whether they are doing and providing what they say they will, and the quality of services being provided. For example, to judge how effectively local partnerships are improving early education and care programs for all children, evaluators would look only at closely related services and then at the specific components of each of these, such as: education levels for teachers, directors, and family child care providers; indicators of teacher compensation and stability such as salaries, benefits, and turnover; and whether programs are affordable for low-income families. Evaluators might also look at the range of services available in the community and the number of families being served.

Limitations

Like community-level evaluations, program-level evaluations raise their own set of concerns.

The possibility of initiative drift. Program evaluation is appealing because it can produce useful data on the initiative's impact at a relatively early stage. Findings can show the delivery of services and support, the number of children and families served, and the efficiency with which individual components of the initiative have met their targets. Techniques for counting inputs and outputs are readily available and familiar to most evaluators. However, focusing on individual programmatic activities may detract the community's attention from the strategies necessary to improve the entire system of early childhood services and supports. This drift may not only affect the nature of what communities choose to evaluate but the initiative's overall design and implementation.

The challenge of uniform performance standards. State efforts to ensure high quality programs by establishing uniform performance standards need to be carefully developed and applied. There is wide variation both in the methods local partnerships use to accomplish their overall goals and among programs and services within each partnership. Because there are multiple paths to success, it may be quite difficult for evaluators to measure whether one strategy is better at achieving a goal than others and make inferences about the relative achievements of different partnerships and programs.

There are also likely to be significant differences in the wealth, human resources, and physical facilities across communities. This is a cause for concern because communities with the greatest needs often also have the fewest resources, under-developed infrastructure, and limited collaborative capacity. Should they be expected to meet the same targets as more advantaged communities, in the same period of time, with the same amount of technical assistance? Flexibility in state expectations and capacity-building support is necessary to ensure that standards are reasonable and can be actually attained by *all* communities.

In addition, good programs that have not yet been in effect for long enough to show results may be penalized. They may lose funds and be forced to cut back on their services or shut down their operations. States must consider if and how individual programs and services, agencies, and initiatives will be penalized if they are not achieving results, and how this will impact services for children and families in the community.

Child-Level Evaluations

Evaluations at this level look at individual children and groups of children to assess how well initiatives are meeting their chief goals. School readiness is a major goal of most early childhood initiatives and there is enormous demand for good information about how well-prepared children are to enter kindergarten. Several states, including Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina, are undertaking large-scale evaluations of school readiness among individual children in order to see what impact their initiatives are having.

- In North Carolina, at the request of the governor and the state superintendent of public instruction, a team representing the state's early childhood, K-12, and higher education communities was assembled to advise the state on the most appropriate and effective way to measure children's school readiness. Forty members developed a two-pronged approach designed not only to assess children but schools as well. The options the team considered and the decisions it made provide valuable lessons for other states considering a child-centered evaluation of school readiness. The group faced several challenges. It had to come up with a workable method for evaluating readiness, and then devise an effective way to implement it. Members had to decide whether all children in the state would be tested or whether a sample would be drawn and assessed. They also had to determine when the assessment would take place, what instruments would be used, and who would conduct the assessment. The team developed a definition of school readiness based on the five components of child development outlined by the National Education Goals Panel in 1990. Next, they selected a set of assessment instruments to measure each of the five components, which include:
  - physical well-being and motor development
  - social and emotional development
  - approaches toward learning
  - language development and communication
  - cognition and general knowledge.

  When completed, the North Carolina Readiness Assessment was designed to gather information from teachers and parents as well as children. Since the team agreed that school readiness also depends on the ability of schools to teach the particular children they serve,[23] the assessment explores the extent to which school staff and policies reflect an understanding of child development. It asks how well teachers use knowledge about each child's strengths, interests, needs, and social and cultural background to design and implement appropriate individualized

instruction for all students.[24] Class size, percentage of kindergarten teachers with early childhood licensure, and other factors are also considered.

The assessment was piloted using a random statewide sample in fall 2000 and repeated in fall 2001. This schedule allows time for children to adjust to kindergarten, while still providing a valid reading of initial school readiness.

- In Florida, a working group of the state's Partnership for School Readiness is developing performance standards and measures that will include mandatory, uniform screening for all children entering kindergarten. The screening, piloted in September 2001, will replace many different instruments currently used by individual districts. The state believes that a uniform screening tool will make it possible to compare readiness across communities. Florida's early childhood community hopes that screening information will help increase support for improvements in their programs. Because the assessment emphasizes social and emotional development as well as cognitive skills and language acquisition, teachers see it as consistent with, and supportive of, a developmental approach to classroom teaching.

  The assessment has three purposes. The first is to catch undiagnosed special needs so children can receive appropriate services. The second purpose is to improve the quality of kindergarten instruction. The third is to provide feedback to local commissions on what programs and strategies seem to be working and what is not working.

  In addition to developing a uniform assessment, the team has sought funding for a longitudinal random sample study. Its purpose is to understand whether children who were in preschool programs with good teacher-to-child ratios, certified teachers, or teachers with Bachelor's degrees enter kindergarten "more ready" than children who were not in programs with such indicators of high quality. The study will also examine differences in the degree of readiness among children in prekindergarten programs, Head Start programs, licensed child care centers, licensed child care homes, and informal care.

Limitations

Two major challenges in evaluating impacts on individual children have to do with the difficulty of testing very young children and the need for multiple measures to accurately assess the complex nature of what is being measured. States need to consider these challenges in developing their own evaluation approaches and determining how data should be collected and used.

The difficulty of assessing young children. Experts on child development and assessment agree that it is a challenge to assess children accurately, especially when they are less than eight years old. According to a Smart Start report, this is in part because school readiness is comprised of many factors including good health, good motor, social, and emotional skills, and successful language and cognitive development, as well as number and letter awareness. It is also influenced by "curiosity, the capacity to share with other children, and respect adults."[25] For five-year-olds, these skills are not most accurately assessed by standardized achievement tests; in fact, evaluations of young children can provide inaccurate information and potentially cause them harm. Because researchers' current capacity to test young children is weak and can lead to faulty conclusions, it is important to ensure that results cannot be traced back to a particular child or program.

The need for multiple measures. Child assessments need to be conducted with great caution and their results must be interpreted with care. It is best to rely on multiple sources of information including observations, assessments, and discussions with parents, caregivers, and teachers[26] even though these techniques are time-consuming, complex, and expensive. In order to estimate the readiness of groups of children, many experts recommend the use of matrix testing, in which individual children are tested on some, but not all, components of readiness with results aggregated over the larger population.

Box 5. When Evaluating Children: "First, Do No Harm"

Richard Clifford of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina has been involved with Smart Start from the beginning. He has also been closely involved in developing the state's school readiness assessment. He makes the following recommendations for states considering child-centered assessment as a part of their evaluations:

1. "Do no harm"

Carefully consider how individual children will be evaluated and how the resulting data will be aggregated and interpreted. Too much testing can be burdensome to a young child. It is physically and often emotionally tiring and time-consuming. It may also decrease the amount of time the child has for positive classroom learning and interaction. Evaluators and others who interpret data must understand the variability in child development and the wide range of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills that are normal among five-year-old children.

Ultimately data should not be used to determine whether children can enter kindergarten. Regardless of what evaluations indicate about children's level of readiness, schools should be ready to teach children with a wide variety of skills and needs.

Box 5. When Evaluating Children: "First, Do No Harm" (continued)

2. Do not use assessment data to make individual decisions
Experts agree that group assessment data about children should not be reported or used to make "high stakes" decisions about individual children, teachers, or schools. The validity of individual assessments for such purposes can be suspect, as performance can vary from day to day depending on their mood, interest, and energy level. Data should be collected from groups of children and then analyzed. For individual children, multiple sources of data should be used before decisions are made.

3. Resist oversimplification
No one method of assessment can adequately capture the complex set of abilities that indicate whether or not a child is prepared to succeed in school. An array of assessment strategies must be used to adequately reflect and represent all children. There is no one standard of readiness to aim for.

Ultimately, data should not be used to determine whether children can enter kindergarten. Regardless of what evaluations indicate about children's level of readiness, schools should be ready to teach children with a wide variety of skills and needs.

Ensure Localities Have the Time and Resources to Accomplish What Is Being Evaluated

As discussed in Chapter 9, *Link Planning to Accountability*, communities should lay the groundwork for evaluation in the early planning stages. This allows states and localities to consider costs and develop working relationships with the professionals and institutions that will conduct the evaluation work or serve as consultants.

Experts agree that while thinking about evaluation should begin early, states should wait until local initiatives are well-established before requiring evaluation. Many communities will have to do considerable work building their administrative and programmatic capacity before they can make much headway toward larger goals. For example, increasing the number of children in accredited child care programs depends on increasing the supply of child care programs that receive accreditation. It can take a program a year or more, depending on its quality at the beginning of the process, to prepare for and receive accreditation. It would be unrealistic to expect a large increase in the number of children enrolled in accredited child care programs in less than a year. If an evaluation is conducted

before results in a community can be demonstrated, evaluation data could encourage a state to abandon a local initiative that might actually have been making progress and discourage other efforts.

Regardless of the time allowed for planning evaluations and how long communities wait before conducting them, it is counterproductive for states to tie funding decisions about comprehensive initiatives to targets that are impossible to attain with minimal funding. According to an Iowa expert, "States should focus their evaluation efforts on what communities are able to do with the resources they have and identify the improvements that communities have been able to achieve." More needs to be done to help policymakers and other funders understand that it is unrealistic to expect major improvements from minor investments.

Design Evaluations Strategically and Use Them Constructively

Evaluation can be a useful tool to help states and communities move forward to develop effective supports for children and families if they are used appropriately and strategically. This requires building in funding and adequate time as well as employing multiple perspectives and data tools, measuring short-term accomplishments, and using findings to aggressively make the case for change. Evaluation should be used in a way that reflects state and local circumstances and implemented in a thoughtful manner that ensures that children and families will have access to services.

Consider Multiple Tools and Perspectives

It is important to use data collection tools that are reliable and respected. Using several different tools helps capture a comprehensive picture of progress. When interviews, observations, focus groups, surveys, and other techniques are combined thoughtfully they can provide a more rounded understanding of accomplishments and challenges from multiple perspectives.

It also pays to take full advantage of simple, inexpensive, and existing data collection opportunities. Program audits are one such example. Every state initiative requires an independent audit of local initiatives. Although they usually focus on fiscal accountability, they provide program information as well, since determining the purposes for which funds have been spent is often part of a fiscal accountability review.

Experts agree that while thinking about evaluation should begin early, states should wait until local initiatives are well established before requiring evaluation. Many communities will have to do considerable work building their administrative and programmatic capacity before they can make much headway toward larger goals.

- Massachusetts contracts with private auditing firms to conduct fiscal and programmatic reviews of randomly selected community partnerships on an annual basis. The state uses the results of these reviews to structure the content of regional training sessions for local councils designed to build fiscal policies and practices that support strong programs.

Sometimes states develop new tools either specifically as part of the initiative or as a component of other efforts. These tools can generate new, more accurate information, and make information easier to collect. However, it is important to coordinate the data that are gathered using the new tools with data obtained using previous approaches.

- For more than 20 years, South Carolina used the same tool to measure the school readiness of children. The state is currently instituting a new work sampling screening instrument. This poses a challenge for the state's First Steps initiative because the new and old tools are not comparable. Therefore, First Steps has hired an evaluation consulting group to compare the new work sampling data with readiness data from the old instrument.

Recognize Short-Term Accomplishments

When evaluation is required before results can be reasonably expected, states should encourage evaluation methods that look at interim measures of success, as well as analyze the initiative's process and implementation. Local councils can use this information to be more intentional in their planning and implementation, to identify opportunities for mid-course corrections as shifts in program and community factors dictate, and to contribute information to a statewide pool of best practices.

- In the early years of North Carolina's Smart Start initiative, evaluations centered on the planning process, collaboration, community involvement, and early lessons learned. They also concentrated on providing baseline data from which to later measure Smart Start's achievements.

- Colorado designed evaluation strategies that could be used to help strengthen the future growth and development of its initiative rather than to judge it prematurely. Enacting legislation required a completed evaluation just 18 months after the first 12 pilot communities were selected. The evaluation, conducted by the University of Colorado, examined how well pilots were combining funding sources from Head Start, the Colorado Department of Human Services, and the Colorado Department of Education; the barriers to

delivery of quality services they were experiencing; and the effectiveness of consolidated child care service delivery.

The state did not allocate any additional funds to assist communities in developing and implementing their consolidated systems; however, the Colorado Department of Human Services was authorized to waive any state laws or rules that would prevent pilot site agencies from implementing their projects or blending funding. The assessment included a procedure to examine how effective these waivers were in removing barriers and identified obstacles to consolidation that remained.

The evaluation found that nine of the 12 communities were effectively using the waiver process to design and implement more comprehensive services. Eleven of the 12 local councils identified increased collaboration and improved communication as the most important outcomes of the planning and early implementation period. The evaluation also identified additional barriers that needed to be addressed, including difficulties in handling reporting and cost allocation requirements and in tapping multiple funding streams.

- The California Children and Families Commission is working in concert with 58 county commissions to establish a statewide evaluation process that will include a common set of evaluation criteria and indicators to allow both the state commission and each county commission to effectively implement results-based accountability practices. Evaluation of Proposition 10-funded programs will include the review of direct services as well as improvements made to systems of care, such as the implementation of integrated, accessible, and inclusive services. Evaluation strategies will allow for both short-term and long-term quantitative and qualitative analysis, as well as longitudinal studies to measure long-term impacts upon children's lives.

Use Findings to Make the Case for Change

An effective evaluation can be used not only to assess an initiative but also to build support for it. Findings can be summarized in brief reports that highlight achievements that can be reasonably expected at each level of the initiative's development. In the early years, expectations should be geared to improvements in interim measures—accomplishments that set the stage for later gains in agreed upon indicators. Evaluation data should make it easy for funders and the public to see the impact of comprehensive services on children and families. They should also drive home the point that in order to achieve measurable, community-wide impacts, whole systems—not just individual services—need to

change. While underscoring the costs and challenges involved in doing this, findings should emphasize the progress that is being made and the next steps underway.

- The Colorado Consolidated Child Care Pilot evaluation, and its clear identification of the initiative's strengths as well as barriers to its success, opened the door for discussions regarding state policy changes that could improve the program and make it more effective at the local level. Although Colorado did not increase funding immediately, the evaluation's recommendations to improve the waiver process and provide more technical assistance were implemented when the pilot expanded to additional communities.

- Massachusetts' Community Partnerships for Children used its 1996 evaluation to inform legislators who were considering whether to expand the then three-year-old effort statewide. Evaluators from Tufts University gathered information from key players involved in implementation and laid out findings that were clear and easy for policymakers to interpret. Respondents believed that the initiative had improved collaboration and increased the affordability, availability, quality, and comprehensiveness of early care and education in their communities. The evaluation also found that Community Partnership funds had leveraged additional community resources. It estimated that communities contributed 45 cents for every state Partnership dollar, in addition to providing in-kind donations. The evaluation indicated that the initiative fostered more efficient sharing of resources across partner agencies as well. The report noted obstacles to continued improvement, including turf issues, limited resources, and time constraints. As a result of the evaluation, the state board made policy changes to improve the initiative. These included increasing membership requirements for local councils and expanding eligibility from low-income and at-risk families to working families earning up to 125 percent of the state median income. The state more than tripled funding as well.

Understand Local Circumstances and Shape Policy Accordingly

When state expectations are not met at the local level, what should be done? This is a question for policymakers, state boards, and funders, more than evaluators. A thorough evaluation, however, should convey the reasons for failure and provide a rationale for state boards to take needed action. States should examine whether results have been poor because the locality has not mobilized its resources well or because it started further behind the starting

block than other communities. Accountability efforts should not penalize communities simply because they have high need, nor should they fault promising efforts that simply have not been operating long enough to show major results.

- North Carolina has established high performance standards for local partnerships, but these standards offer some flexibility to respond to individual communities' situations. For example, while local partnerships typically must have 50 percent of their children in high quality child care settings to receive performance bonuses, those that have been operating for a shorter amount of time can initially qualify for bonuses by meeting lower targets.

Consider the Impact of State Action

States must determine when it is appropriate for the state to intercede or take over a local council that is not meeting performance standards, or for the local council to defund services that are not meeting targets that they have set. If states and localities do choose to intervene, they must then consider what sanctions should be used, if any, for ineffective programs. They must also decide whether and how to reward programs for exceeding minimum standards. While evaluations can help guide state decisions in these areas, clear guidelines for sanctioning, defunding, or rewarding programs should be in place early in the process.

When a particular service or program is not meeting state and local objectives, states should afford local councils a primary voice in deciding when to defund individual services or arrangements. These changes should be seen not as evidence of poor choices but as indications of an initiative that has established communication channels with consumers, is responsive to feedback, and strong enough to make changes that keep the initiative focused on results.

At the same time, local control is not the outcome of community initiatives; it is a strategy. When local efforts consistently do not demonstrate improvement on key performance measures, the state council must have the authority to step in, require technical assistance, help local councils redirect their efforts, and, if necessary, defund a local effort and take responsibility for it at the state level.

Conclusion: The Elements of Successful Initiatives

Comprehensive early childhood initiatives offer a hopeful approach to improving the quality and extent of early childhood supports. Local planning councils present an opportunity to build a broad new constituency for children as well as a vehicle for weaving together and strengthening supports for children and families. However, these initiatives are not a panacea. Poorly designed community planning efforts can create a false sense of forward movement for children as well as a sense of failure for communities. To succeed, these efforts must be built on a stable foundation. Three pillars of this foundation are evident throughout this guide: new funding, a clear vision and strong leadership, and reasonable expectations. These elements permeate every aspect of successful state-driven efforts on behalf of children and families.

Provide New Funding

States must provide new funding for planning, implementation, and evaluation. State and local councils should be adequately staffed and supported and require additional resources to help localities implement new service delivery strategies. Planning designed to coordinate existing services and resources may make it easier for families to access what is available but, without new resources, coordination alone will not increase the number, kind, or quality of child care and early childhood services. At present, not even the most generously funded state initiative comes close to providing localities with the dollar amount needed to make sure that every child and family can draw on a full set of early

Comprehensive early childhood initiatives offer a hopeful approach to improving the quality and extent of early childhood supports. Local planning councils present an opportunity to build a broad new constituency for children as well as a vehicle for weaving together and strengthening supports for children and families.

childhood supports. Less than perfect funding should not be an excuse for inaction, but without at least some additional funding, state and local partnership efforts will have little if any positive effect on children and families.

Build Collaborative Leadership

Successful state and local partnerships are guided by a clear vision and strong leadership that reaches across traditional dividing lines and speaks to multiple interest groups. A broad vision helps bring people together and can build a constituency. However, some tension between advocacy for individual programs and collaboration is natural. It is challenging for programs that have never had enough resources to look beyond their own pressing needs. State and local policymakers must recognize the inevitable tensions that are likely to surface and use skill and resolve to keep these from weakening collaborative efforts. It is essential to negotiate among all participants a clear statement of purpose about how the initiative is to be governed, who should participate, and what it is expected to accomplish. States and communities should not assume that basic differences in perspective and organizational agenda will go away, even if they seem to recede. They should consider the potential impact of these differences at every step along the way and continually work to restate and redefine common ground.

Astute political leadership is necessary to keep strong partners talking and working toward a common purpose. Participants should not be selected because they are likely to agree easily with each other. The most effective members are muscular advocates for children, who represent critical constituencies, effectively engage parents, have influence, and have access to resources. States and localities that assume that collaboration means easy cooperation are not likely to engage or retain membership that builds broad support for their initiatives, and are more likely to reach lowest common denominator solutions rather than genuine innovation.

Set Reasonable Expectations

States and localities need to show that initiatives are making a difference but must be realistic about what their impact can be. When false expectations are not met, initiatives are assumed to have failed. This can have lasting consequences for future investments and efforts.

Early childhood initiatives are expected to strengthen child care and early childhood services, and help to build a connected and comprehensive service delivery system that responds to families' schedules and their need for early care and education, health care, parent education and family support. In the process, they can ensure that more children begin school ready to learn. Collaborative strategies are based in part on the understanding that no single sector can provide all of the support children and families need to succeed as learners, workers, family members, and citizens. But expectations must be reasonable. Entering school ready to learn is not the same as arriving at school *every day* ready to learn. Early childhood supports will not solve the literacy issues faced by many public schools unless developmentally appropriate services are available to children and families beyond the preschool years and essential improvements are made in teaching and learning throughout the elementary school grades.

States need to carefully define what they mean by "school readiness" and determine what impact their initiatives can realistically have in a specified period. Partners should consider baseline information about the status of children and families, current resources, and the extent of additional financial support. Here, too, astute political leadership will be essential not only to define but also to measure progress, effectively communicate results attainable at each level of the initiative's development, and advocate for additional investments required for initiatives to meet their goals.

APPENDIX I:

Allowable Uses of State Initiative Funds

STATE	ELIGIBILITY	ALLOWABLE USES
California	Children prenatal to age 5 and their families	Child care, health, and family support.
Colorado	Children birth to age 5 and their families	Child care subsidy administration; quality enhancements including health, mental health, and family support; and supply building.
Florida	Children birth to age 5 and their families	School readiness activities including child care subsidy administration, quality enhancements, and family support.
Iowa	Children birth to age 5 and their families	Early Childhood funding (federal TANF dollars transferred to the CCDBG) can be used to: enhance quality child care capacity in support of parent capability to obtain or retain employment, including but not limited to developing capacity for regular child care including recruitment of providers, mildly ill child care, second or third shift child care, and infant care. Funds can also be used to provide training to center- and home-based providers to improve the quality of care, assist providers in meeting licensing, registration, or accreditation standards, enhance linkages with Head Start, Early Head Start, child development and child care programs, provide information to parents on choosing quality care, and pay for limited facility expenses, such as minor remodeling and purchase of equipment. School Ready funding (all state funds) can be used for preschool services, parent support, and education services including home visitation, child development services, child care services, and children's health and safety services.
Kansas	Children birth to age 5 and their families	Strategies to improve the quality of child care and early education; increase access to child care and early education services; support child health; and support families.
Kentucky	Children prenatal to age 5 and their families	Planning for comprehensive health, child care, early education, and family support activities.

Allowable Uses of State Initiative Funds (continued)

STATE	ELIGIBILITY	ALLOWABLE USES
Massachusetts	Children from 2.9 years to age of kindergarten entry and their families	Any activities that accomplish these five objectives: 1. Increase the affordability and accessibility of programs for 3- and 4-year-old children of diverse cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds through the use of a sliding fee scale. 2. Enhance collaboration among families, community programs, business, and other organizations concerned with children and families to develop a system of early care and education, reduce duplication of services, and promote equitable services. 3. Provide comprehensive early childhood programs and services for 3- and 4-year-old children of working families. 4. Provide early childhood programs and services that are high quality. 5. Conduct community outreach to ensure that children, particularly those whose families may be difficult to reach through traditional methods, are offered opportunities to participate in a program that meets their needs.
North Carolina	Children birth to age 5 and their families	Activities that promote the quality of child care, health, and family support activities. At least 30 percent must be allocated for child care subsidy.
South Carolina	Children birth to age of first grade entry and their families	All activities must be made available to young children and families on a voluntary basis and focus on the following: Lifelong learning: school readiness, parenting skills, family literacy, and adult and continuing education; Health care: nutrition, affordable access to quality age-appropriate health care, early and periodic screenings, required immunizations, initiatives to reduce injuries to infants and toddlers, and technical assistance and consultation for parents and child care providers on health and safety issues; Quality child care: staff training and professional development incentives, quality cognitive learning programs, voluntary accreditation standards, accessibility to quality child care and development resources, and affordability; and Transportation: coordinated service, accessibility, increased utilization and efficiency, and affordability.

APPENDIX II

Resources and Contact Information

State Web Sites and Contact Information

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Additional Website Information

California Proposition 10 Technical Assistance Service Center
www.healthpolicycoach.org

Families and Work Institute
www.familiesandwork.org

Fiscal Policy Studies Institute
www.fiscalpolicystudies.com

National Smart Start Technical Assistance Center
www.ncsmartstart.org

APPENDIX III:

Massachusetts Community Assessments

The community assessment tool developed for Massachusetts' community partnerships provides the following guidance on how to gather and analyze information.

Information needed to complete the chart below may be gathered from the following sources:

- Department of Public Health
- Families with 3- and 4-year-old children (2.9 years – kindergarten-eligible)
- Early intervention programs
- Child care resource and referral agencies
- Public schools and Head Start programs
- Private programs and family child care providers
- U.S. Census of Population and Housing
- Local community development department.

DEMOGRAPHICS	Number of 3- and 4-year-old children
A. Total number of 3- and 4-year-old children in the community including those with disabilities (*do not count children eligible for public kindergarten*)	
B. Number of 3- and 4-year-old children currently being served in programs (*public, private, Head Start or family child care programs*)	
C. Number of 3- and 4-year-old children currently being served in programs *who need additional early care/education hours*	
D. Number of 3- and 4-year-old children currently unserved (not in a program) *who need early care/education*	
E. Of the above number of children, how many are from *working* families?	
F. Of the above number of children, how many are not from *working* families?	
G. Of the children identified in A and who need early care/education, how many are children whose first language is other than English?	
H. Number of 3- and 4-year-old children *with disabilities who need additional child care*	

Existing Programs/Services (List names of programs; indicate inclusive programs with *)	**Number of Classes/Programs per Location**	**Daily Hours of Operation**	**Full- or Part-Year** (mos. of operation)	**Per-Child Cost/Tuition** (convert to hourly)	**Current Enrollment** (3- & 4-year-olds	**Capacity**	**Accredited NAEYC/ NAFCC/CDA**	**OCCS* Licensed** (if applicable)	**Total # of Programs in Category**
Public School preschool programs:							(NAEYC)		
Private (center-based) programs:							(NAEYC)		
Head Start programs:							(NAEYC)		
Family Child Care:							(CDA/NAFCC)		
	Total # _____				Total # 3- & 4-year-olds _____	Total capacity _____	# NAEYC _____ # CDA _____ # NAFCC _____	# OCCS Licensed _____ *Office of Child Care Services	Total # Programs _____

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APPENDIX IV:

Alameda County Outcomes, Strategies, and Measures

Outcome A: Improved Child Social and Emotional Well-Being

OUTCOME INDICATORS	STRATEGIES	PROCESS MEASURES
1. Proportion of early childhood educators capable of screening child behavioral health	1. Improve the ability of child care providers to perform child behavioral health screening	1. Number of providers trained to perform behavioral health screening
2. Proportion of children needing behavioral health assessments	2. Increase availability of child behavioral health consultation to early childhood educators	2. Number of child behavioral health consultations
	3. Increase early identification of children needing behavioral health assessments	3. Number of family support service providers trained in using the child social/emotional screening tool (Devereux Early Childhood Assessment)
	4. Expand availability of parenting classes	4a. Number of parenting classes
	5. Increase availability and quality of developmental support services to parents and families	4b. Number of parents attending parenting classes
		5. Number of families receiving developmental support services

Outcome B: Improved Access to High Quality Care

OUTCOME INDICATORS	STRATEGIES	PROCESS MEASURES
1. Proportion of credentialed Child Development Corps members	1. Develop the Child Development Corps	1a. Documentation of Child Development Corps Plan
2. Proportion of Child Development Corps members who complete professional growth requirements during the reporting year	2a. Establish tracking system to monitor education and training levels of early childhood educators enrolled in the Child Development Corps	1b. Number of enrolled members in the Child Development Corps
3. Proportion of child care settings reviewed with a formal quality assessment tool	2b. Increase the level of training for Child Development Corps members and other child care staff	2a. Implementation of the incentive tracking system
	3. Train Child Development Corps members to use formal quality assessment tools	2b. Number of training opportunities for Child Development Corps members and other child care staff
		3. Number of child care settings evaluated by formal quality assessment tools

Outcome C: Improved Kindergarten Performance

OUTCOME INDICATORS	STRATEGIES	PROCESS MEASURES
1. School attendance	1. Train early childhood educators and parents on school readiness	1. Number of early childhood educators and parents trained on school readiness
2. Proportion of children who successfully matriculate to first grade	2. Increase public awareness of the importance of kindergarten	2. Number and kinds of media messages addressing the importance of school readiness and attendance
3. Proportion of children three years and older who are read to daily	3a. Provide increased access to books and age-appropriate materials to early childhood educators and parents	3a. Number and description of dissemination methods and outlets for books and age-appropriate materials
	3b. Increase the availability and quality of developmental support services to parents and families	3b. Number and description of available developmental support services

Endnotes

1 S.E. Rimm-Kaufman, R.C. Pianta, and M.J.Cox, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2000 cited in Early Education Clearinghouse, "Kindergarten Teachers Perceive Difficulty in Transitions to School," *Facts in Action*, Associated Day Care Services, Nov. 2000.

2 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "New Statistics Show Only Small Percentage of Eligible Families Receive Child Care Help" (December 6, 2000): Press release. Retrieved from the Internet at www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/ccstudy2.htm.

3 Calculations by the Children's Defense Fund using data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau on Head Start enrollment in FY 2000 and from U.S. Census Bureau on poverty rates by single year of age for 1999.

4 Helen Blank, Andrea Behr, and Karen Schulman, *State Developments in Child Care, Early Education and School-Age Care* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 2001).

5 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "2000 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates." Available on the Internet at www.bls.gov/oes/2000/oes_nat.htm.

6 The state partnership, rather than the legislature, now has the authority to develop rules for the use of these funds by January 2002, a very short timeframe. This authority is now being challenged by members of the legislature, and the question will be decided in court.

7 This is true with the exception of South Carolina, which funds services for children until they enter first grade, and Massachusetts, which pays for direct services to children between the ages of 2.9 and kindergarten entry. Because community partnerships in Massachusetts can use state dollars to enhance quality in programs that serve children from birth to five, these improvements also affect infants and toddlers in programs that receive funding.

8 California's guidelines can be obtained from the California Children and Families Commission. Massachusetts' guide for Community Partnerships can be obtained from the Massachusetts Department of Education Office of Early Learning Services. Appendix II contains contact information.

9 Carolyn Kroll and Michele Rivest, *Sharing the Stories* (Durham, NC: Early Childhood Initiatives, 2000).

10 Atelia Melaville, Martin Blank, and Gelareh Asayesh, *Together We Can* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1993).

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13. Colorado Department of Human Services and Colorado Department of Education, *Assessment of Community Consolidated Child Care Pilot Program Technical Report*, 1999.

14. This and additional guidance from the Families and Work Institute for members of local planning councils can be found on the Internet at www.familiesandwork.org.

15. Amy Laura Dombro, Nina Sazer O'Donnell, Ellen Galinsky, Sarah Gilkeson Melcher, and Abby Farber, *Community Mobilization: Strategies to Support Young Children and Their Families* (New York, NY: Families and Work Institute, 1996).

16. Sara Watson, *Using Results to Improve the Lives of Children and Families: A Guide for Public-Private Child Care Partnerships* (Washington, DC: The Finance Project, 2000).

17. This and additional guidance from the Families and Work Institute for members of local planning councils can be found on the Internet at www.familiesandwork.org.

18. Massachusetts Department of Education Office of Early Learning Services, *Securing Our Future: Planning What We Want for Our Youngest Children*, 2001.

19. This and additional guidance from the Families and Work Institute for members of local planning councils can be found on the Internet at www.familiesandwork.org.

20. More information on Boston's assessment can be found in Jason Sachs, "The Boston Inventory: Putting Child Care Quality on the Map," *Child Care Bulletin* January/February 1997.

21. Sara Watson, *Informed Consent: Advice for State and Local Leaders on Implementing Results-Based Decisionmaking* (Washington, DC: The Finance Project, 2000).

22. Mark Friedman, *Results Accountability for Proposition 10 Commissions: A Planning Guide for Improving the Well-Being of Young Children and Their Families* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, 2000).

23. Eugene M. Lewit and Linda Schuurmann Baker, "Child Indicators: School Readiness," *The Future of Children* 5 no. 2, 1995.

24. North Carolina Education Research Council, *First in America 2000 Reports*, 2000.

25. University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, Smart Start Evaluation Team, *The Effects of Smart Start Child Care on Kindergarten Entry Skills* (Chapel Hill, NC: FPG, 1998).

26. National Association for the Education of Young Children, *Testing of Young Children: Concerns and Cautions* (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1988); Committee on School Health and Committee on Early Childhood of the American Academy of Pediatrics, "*The Inappropriate Use of School Readiness Tests*," Pediatrics 95 (1995).

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A Fragile Foundation: State Child Care Assistance Policies. Karen Schulman, Helen Blank, and Danielle Ewen. November 2001.

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Also note that numerous child care fact sheets
and other child data are available on CDF's website at
www.childrensdefense.org.

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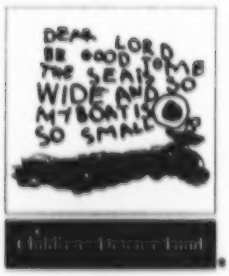

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